

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 2025	July 2026

At South Hampstead we view student attendance as critical to academic success, social integration and wellbeing. We ask parents to familiarize 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.

Our aims are:

- To develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes good attendance
- To ensure, as far as possible, that every pupil can benefit from and make their full contribution to the life of the school
- To build strong relationships with families, encouraging them to take an active role in promoting good attendance and punctuality
- To respond proactively to non-attendance and/or lateness in a proportionate and targeted way
- To work closely with pupils, their families and, if appropriate, the local authority where attendance becomes a concern.

We expect the highest standards of attendance and punctuality, reflecting our commitment to wellbeing and achievement. Our school target is 95%.

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 Head 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 pupil is late, she must sign in at reception as soon as she arrives, giving a reason for her absence.. Lateness without reasonable cause will be deemed to be unauthorised absence. Lateness after registers are closed at reception 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, early morning detention. If those late arrivals continue, pupils will be given an after-school detention and, following that, the Senior Deputy Head, Pastoral will become involved if the lateness persists.

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 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 authorized 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 (I)

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 (M)

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 (C)

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 (R)

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.

Exceptional Circumstances (C)

Absence due to exceptional circumstances may be authorised at the school's discretion, adhering to the guidance set out by government. Spectating at sports events or attending concerts are not sufficient cause for authorization, nor does this include holidays or leaves of absence at the start or end of term to facilitate travel. Guidance on exceptional circumstances suggests:

- A parent, grandparent or other close relative is seriously ill
- The event is a unique, one-off, never-to-be-repeated occasion which can only take place in the time requested

Study Leave (S)

Study leave may be authorised in preparation for the public examinations of Years 11 and 13. 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 granted to pupils undertaking a public examination out-of-year (eg. a Year 9 pupil taking a GCSE in their native language) – this will be in the form of the half-day immediately preceding the examination.

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 parents will be contacted. 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.

Unauthorised absence codes are as follows:

- G – holiday taken but not granted by the school
- N – reason for absence not yet established
- U – arrived at school after registers closed
- O – absence in other, unauthorised, circumstances

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.

Persistent or severe absence, even when 'authorised':

Government guidance defines precise levels of absence requiring school and / or local authority intervention as follows:

A pupil is 'below school target' if they miss more than 5% of their schooling across the school year, for any reason. (Level 1)

A pupil is 'at risk of persistent absence' if they miss 8-9% of their schooling across the school year, for any reason. (Level 2)

A pupil is a 'persistent absentee' if they miss 10% or more of their schooling across the school year, for any reason. (Level 3)

A pupil is "severely absent" if they miss 50% or more of their sessions across the school year for any reason. (Level 4)

A referral may be made to the local authority in a case of unauthorised absence of 5 school days within a rolling ten-school-week period.

Schools should inform the local authority where pupils are likely to miss more than 15 school days because of sickness.

Schools must inform the local authority when pupils miss 10 consecutive school days unauthorised.

'Persistent absence' (10% or more), for which the cause is unclear, requires the school to investigate further and work with the local authority, if necessary, 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 (more than 50% absence), this effort must be concerted as there will not only be loss of academic progress but social and development loss.

Support for pupils and families 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 (EBSA). 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 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 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 visits.

In order to ensure that parents are fully informed of their daughter's attendance record and level of absence, notices will be sent to those with absence below 92%, setting out these details. Samples of these notices are included in the appendix. These notices are intended to be supportive, not punitive, and the school seeks to work with parents to understand any barriers to attendance, removing them where possible and helping the young person return to as full attendance as possible.

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 individualized support approaches that meet their specific needs where appropriate. This may include the creation of a part-time timetable, agreed between the school, the parents and the pupil, which will be reviewed at regular intervals with a view to moving the pupil back toward full attendance.

Sources of reference:

Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance, February 2023

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63ee20a3d3bf7f62e5f76ba4/Summary_of_responsibilities_where_a_mental_health_issue_is_affecting_attendance.pdf

Working together to improve school attendance

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf

Appendix A: attendance codes (gov't mandated nationally)

Present Codes

Code	Definition	Statistical Meaning
/ or \	Present at school	Attending
L	Late before registers close	Attending
V	Attending an educational visit or trip	Attending (approved educational activity)
P	Participating in a sporting activity (must note provider – 'SHHS' for fixtures)	Attending (approved educational activity)
B	Attending any other approved educational activity (must note provider – 'SHHS' for school-based)	Attending (approved educational activity)
W	Attending work experience	Attending (approved educational activity)

Absence Codes

Code	Definition	Statistical Meaning
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointment)	Authorised absence
M	Leave of absence for the purpose of attending a medical or dental appointment	Authorised absence
R	Religious observance (only applicable on officially declared religious holidays)	Authorised absence
E	Suspended or permanently excluded and no alternative provision made	Authorised absence

Code	Definition	Statistical Meaning
C	Leave of absence for exceptional circumstances (holiday or leisure not valid here)	Authorised absence
C1	Leave of absence for participation in a regulated performance or regulated employment abroad	Authorised absence
C2	Leave of absence for a compulsory school age pupil subject to a part-time timetable	Authorised absence
S	Leave of absence for the purpose of studying for a public examination	Authorised absence
G	Holiday not granted by the school	Unauthorised absence
N	Reason for absence not yet established	Unauthorised absence
O	Absence in other or unknown circumstances	Unauthorised absence
U	Arrived in school after registration closed	Unauthorised absence

Other Codes		
Code	Definition	Statistical Meaning
#	Planned school closure	Not collected
D	Dual registered at another school	Not a possible attendance
Q	Unable to attend school due to lack of access arrangements	Not a possible attendance
X	Non-compulsory school age pupil not required to attend school	Not a possible attendance
Y1	Unable to attend due to transport, normally provided, unavailable	Not a possible attendance
Y2	Unable to attend due to widespread disruption to travel	Not a possible attendance
Y3	Unable to attend due to part of the school being closed	Not a possible attendance

Other Codes		
Code	Definition	Statistical Meaning
Y4	Unable to attend due to whole school unexpectedly closed	Not a possible attendance
Y5	Unable to attend as pupil is in criminal justice detention	Not a possible attendance
Y6	Unable to attend in accordance with public health law or guidance	Not a possible attendance
Y7	Unable to attend because of any other unavoidable cause	Not a possible attendance
Z	Prospective pupil not on admission register	Not collected
K	Attending education provision by local authority	Attending (approved educational activity)
J1	Leave of absence for the purpose of attending an interview for employment or admission to another educational institution	Authorised absence

Appendix B: Requests for leave / absence

Information about planned absence comes into the school in a variety of ways; via reception, form tutors, HoYs or the Head's PA. It can also be generated internally, in relation to trips, visits and fixtures.

All information about planned absences should be entered into SIMS only by reception staff, to ensure consistency in recording. When an absence is approved, this information should be forwarded to senor@shhs.gdst.net as far in advance of the absence as possible. If there are other staff members who will be particularly impacted by the absence, they should be copied in.

Approvals at the Junior School can only be given by the Head.

Approvals in the Senior School can be given by staff according to the following schedule. When in doubt, staff should check with the next, more senior staff member:

Form tutor / reception staff:

- Medical appointments (including mental health support)
- Dental appointments (including orthodontist)
- Routine illness / injury
- Religious observance (only on the days declared officially by the religious body)

Head of Year:

- Extended absence for medical reasons (eg. admission to hospital for a lengthy procedure; recovery from a serious illness; coping with a severe mental health condition)
- 1 day sporting or arts-based activities that are not led by the school (eg. fencing competition; external music exam)
- Family bereavement & routine attendance at a funeral
- Study for public examinations (the half-day immediately preceding the exam only)

Senior Deputy Head, Pastoral; (& Head*):

- Religious observance that goes beyond the official days declared by the religious body
- Sporting or arts-based activities that will take a pupil away from school for an extended period (eg. sky training in Europe for several months; performing in a West End play that will run for 6 weeks)
- Exceptional circumstances
- Work experience which cannot be arranged during the school holidays and is of significant benefit to the pupil

*In some of these instances, the final decision will sit with the Head. The Senior Deputy Head, Pastoral, will consult with the Head accordingly.

Appendix C: Sample School Post message, informing parents of low attendance (SIMS attendance record to be included)

School Attendance

In line with Department for Education requirements, we are writing to let you know that your daughter's attendance has fallen below 92% this academic year. Attached is her attendance record to date. The DfE defines 'persistent absence' as attendance less than 90% and the school target is 95%.

There is a clear, well-documented link between attendance and academic outcomes, and the school has a statutory responsibility to intervene in cases of persistent absence. There are many causes for pupil absence, some of which cannot be avoided. The Head of Year and Senior Deputy Head, Pastoral, will be reviewing your daughter's case and, if we are concerned about your daughter's low attendance or are unclear of the causes, we will be in touch so that we can work together to support your daughter. If you would like to discuss this with us, please contact your Head of Year.

Appendix D: Study Leave at South Hampstead for Y10 and Y11 Internal Exams

The school has had regard to the following when considering authorisation of absence for study leave purposes:

- o [The School Attendance \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2024](#) (PRRs)
- o Statutory Guidance: [Working Together to Improve School Attendance](#) (WTISA)

- [Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK](#) (KCSIE)
- [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#) (ISSRs)
- Study leave for public exams is covered under Regulation 10 of the PRRs and paragraphs 37 and 328-331 of WTISA. The School follows the Regulations and WTISA when authorising study leave for public exams. Pupils in Year 11 are granted study leave one to two days before the first GCSE examination that is taken by SHHS pupils and this study leave continues for the duration of the examination period. During this time, pupils are encouraged to, and do, make use of the school facilities (library and other study spaces) and to make use of the expertise of their teachers whilst undertaking their examination revision and preparation. Teachers continue to mark sample work (eg. past paper questions) for pupils. Providing formative feedback. In some cases they schedule specific study sessions for groups of pupils; in other cases teachers are simply always available to be called upon by individual pupils seeking support.
- WTISA paragraph 37 sets out the DfE expectation that, although not bound by it, independent schools should '*restrict leaves of absence to the specific circumstances set out in regulation 11 [of the PRRs]*'. The same paragraph also says that study leave should not be granted for internal examinations, such as mocks.
- It is noted that 'should' in statutory guidance means the advice should be followed unless there is a good reason not to do so.

The school's leaders, with the support of governors, have considered the statutory guidance carefully and believe that there is a good reason to depart from the guidance and allow some pupils in Years 10 and 11 to have a short period of study leave during periods of internal examinations/mocks.

The risks of taking this approach have been carefully considered by school leaders. These include the risk that pupils do not use the time wisely, that they may not have sufficient support at home and that they may face a greater safeguarding risk from external influences. These risks have been weighed against the potential benefits, using knowledge of our cohort and past experience and data from periods of study leave before this guidance was published.

Pupils at South Hampstead are, on the whole, extremely diligent. The girls in our cohort are driven to succeed and work hard, with their own motivation to achieve their aims. The School teaches and instills in pupils, throughout their secondary school journey, the skills and self-reflection to work effectively in a self-directed manner, an important skill in any aspect of life but particularly so for the preparation for terminal examinations. SHHS pupils are effective independent workers and past and present evidence suggest that they regularly make use of offers of support from teachers. This includes pupils at all levels of attainment and includes those with specific educational needs or disabilities. In the lead-up to examinations, there is a programme of optional extra help sessions, held at lunchtimes and these are well attended by pupils taking ownership of their own learning and preparation.

Pupils at South Hampstead are amongst the most intellectually able in the country, with the average MidYIS score being approximately 124, putting them in the top 5% of the cohort nationally. This means that pupils are aiming for the top grades in their examinations. It also means that they are highly capable in their ability to digest and make use of educational resources, past-paper questions with mark schemes, and teacher feedback from previous assessed work.

Parents at South Hampstead are well engaged and attentive. Attendance at parents' evenings, for instance, is excellent and the School liaises regularly with parents, encouraging them to be in touch with us whenever they have any questions or concerns. South Hampstead parents engage with this dialogue and the School's relationship with parents is positive, constructive and collaborative.

When evaluating the potential benefit, past performance of pupils with study leave has been used as a predictor of future performance. Pupils at South Hampstead have historically studied very well when given independent self-directed study time. Outcomes have been excellent for past cohorts (<https://www.shhs.gdst.net/about-us/results/>) with pupils reporting how much they benefited from being able to establish their own routines and working in ways that suit them best (eg. some work well in silence whilst others with music or white noise playing; some like to test themselves out loud and in pairs whilst others prefer to study on their own using written materials.)

When evaluating the potential risks, past safeguarding data suggests there has not been any observable increase in the number of worrying incidents amongst pupils working independently during study leave periods.

Our assessment is that Year 10 and Year 11 pupils at South Hampstead should be granted study leave for portions of their examination period, if this is requested by their parents and if their parents confirm their understanding that they are responsible for ensuring their child is making good use of that time and that they are responsible for their safety. Each request is considered by the School on a case-by-case basis and study leave is only granted for the duration of the internal examination period. All pupils are welcome and positively encouraged to make use of the School, its study spaces and its teachers, during all examination periods, even in cases where study leave has been granted.

There may be occasions when the School decides not to extend study leave to certain individual pupils. This would be, for instance, if it was deemed that the pupil was not going to be able to make good use of their own independently-directed time or if there were safeguarding reasons why the pupil was better off and / or safer being in the school building with supervision during the school day. In these cases, study leave would not be given (or if it has been given it may be revoked) and the pupil would be expected to work in school with their attendance monitored.

The absence record for study leave will be marked in the following way:

- Code S – study leave for public exams as per Reg 10 and WTISA paras 328-331
- Code X – study leave for 6th form above compulsory school age if they are not timetabled to attend lessons during periods of internal exams/mocks

- Code C – any other authorised absence for study leave requested by parents for compulsory school age pupils during internal / mock examination periods

NB – re the use of Code C; this is used in reference to the DfE guidance note for independent schools to have the power to grant leave of absence at their own discretion where a parent who the pupil normally lives with has asked in advance and they deem them to be exceptional circumstances.