

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 (Attendance Champion)	September 2026	September 2027

At South Hampstead we view student attendance as critical to academic 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.

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 attendance 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 Deputy 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 pupil is late, she must sign in at reception as soon as she arrives. If she fails to do this, the school will respond as though she is absent. Lateness without reasonable cause will be deemed to be unauthorised absence. Lateness after 9.00am will be deemed an absence and will require a note of explanation from a parent.

Pupils who have more than three 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 the 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. Special allowances will continue for the shortest time possible to help the child restore regular, full attendance and will be kept under constant review until that is achieved.

LEAVES OF ABSENCE

Leaves of absence can only be authorised by the Head or Senior Deputy Head and may only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Parents should submit their request to the School 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. Attendance at other religion-based events (eg. christening, bat mitzvah) is not deemed, by the DfE, to be authorisable under this category. Such events will need to be requested as an exceptional circumstance (see below.)

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 authorisation, 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 on.

Persistent or severe absence, even when ‘authorised’:

Government guidance defines precise levels of absence linked to the requirement for school and / or local authority intervention:

A pupil is ‘below school target’ if they miss 5% or more 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. 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 cases where attendance falls below 92%, parents are kept fully informed of their daughter's attendance record and level of absence. Letters will be sent home half-termly, setting out these details. Samples of these letters are included in the appendix. These letters 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.

The school fulfills its statutory duty to liaise with the local authority regarding the pupil roll and any causes for concern in regards to attendance. In particular:

- New pupil & deletion returns: The school will notify the local authority when a pupil's name is added to or deleted from the school admission register outside of standard transition times.
- Attendance returns: The School will report to the local authority the names and addresses of all pupils of compulsory school age who fail to attend school regularly or have been absent for a continuous period of ten school days where their absence has been recorded with one or more of the codes statistically classified as unauthorised (G, N, O, and/or U) (See appendix for links to Camden attendance team)
- Sickness returns: The School will report to the local authority the full name and address of all pupils of compulsory school age who have been recorded with code I (illness) and who the school has reasonable grounds to believe will miss 15 days consecutively or cumulatively because of sickness. (Only one sickness return is required for a continuous period of sickness in a school year. See appendix for links to Camden attendance team.)

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 2026:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a4f9ec6a6586e258d371bd0/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_2026.pdf