



# Durrington High School Attendance Policy 2025 onwards

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Next review	As and when required, in line with new guidance and updated practice	
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House team contact information- <https://durringtonhighschool.co.uk/staff-list/>

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## 1. Aims of the policy:

- To ensure every student achieves and maintains excellent attendance; enabling them to gain maximum benefit from the educational, and wider opportunities on offer as part of our community.
- To ensure all stakeholders understand their role, responsibilities and are active in promoting and supporting excellent student attendance.

## 2. Introduction and expectations

There is a very strong and proven correlation between rates of school attendance and academic success; this is both nationally and at Durrington. Students who attend well and then achieve academic success have a greater range of choices as they move forward to college/later life.

The school minimum expected attendance for each and every student is 96%. This is referred to throughout this policy as “regular attendance”. Any figure below means too much learning is being missed and causes us concern.

Excellent punctuality is also an expectation of students. Being punctual each and every day prepares students well for the world of work and later life.

In exceptional cases where

- o a student has a diagnosed medical need/condition
- o the need/condition is supported by an up-to-date diagnosis, and
- o the specific condition/need is known to impact the student’s ability to attend school

we will make reasonable adjustments to the application of this policy/attendance processes. Where evidence is not forthcoming or there is no clinical professional’s support and/or in situations where school staff have been blocked from communicating with professionals) no adjustments can or will be made. This is because it is an expectation that parents/carers will work with us in the best interests of their children/our students.

## 3. Registration and punctuality

As well as being present in school each day, students are expected to be punctual to school so as not to miss out on our broad and informative period 1 schedule but also to prepare students for the expectations around punctuality in the workplace and later life.

All students must:

- o be in school by 8.40am at the very latest each day
- o attend period 1 and all lessons on time
- o be punctual to all other events, trips and activities they take part in and that are linked to the school

Failure to attend registration on time without a valid explanation will result in a 20-minute

lunchtime detention. Failure to attend this detention will result in further sanctions. In cases of persistent late arrival to school, parents/carers will be contacted and the student will be expected to show an improvement in their punctuality or further sanctions may be put in place. Lates after the register closes will be marked as U coded which is an unauthorised absence and could result in a fixed penalty fine.

#### **4. Expectations of parents/carers**

Through sending your child to Durrington parents and carers accept their statutory responsibilities and commit to sharing the school's moral imperative to ensure their son/daughter attends regularly and has excellent punctuality. We, like you, want the very best for your child.

It is an expectation that you notify the school as soon as possible when your child is unexpectedly absent (e.g. sickness).

The law and government further supports these expectations; the Education Act 1996 stating:

*“As a parent, you must ensure your child receives appropriate full-time education according to their age, ability and aptitude. If your child is registered at a school, then they must attend regularly and punctually. It is your responsibility as the parent to ensure good attendance.”*

And the Secretary of State for Education, stating:

*“...I am calling on parents, schools and families to join us in playing their part to get children in class and ready to learn...”*

#### **5. Absence from school**

Only the Headteacher (not parents/carers or other relatives) can authorise the absence of your child from school. There is no automatic right for a child to be absent from school. The Headteacher may require you to provide evidence of the reason for your child's absence otherwise the absence may be recorded on the official school register as unauthorised “O”.

If your child is for any reason not attending school, parents/carers are responsible for contacting the school. This is a priority for safeguarding reasons. Contact can be made via

- The absence telephone number (01903 705644) or
- The absence email address: [absence@durring.com](mailto:absence@durring.com)

Contact should be made by 8.15am at the latest on the day of the absence and each day after this the student doesn't attend.

Where possible, medical/dental appointments should be held outside of the school day however if unavoidable please contact the absence line/email in advance and provide evidence of the appointments as well as information of when the child will be collected and/or returned to school.

#### **Absence related to worries around mental health reasons**

From working directly with specialist clinicians and GP practices across Worthing there is a clear

message that there is an increased risk if absences are labeled as key to treat mental health difficulties as a “valid excuse” for absence. This is because we know that the very structure, predictability, and support within school are among the strongest protective factors for a child’s emotional wellbeing.

We know that it is also very difficult for students (and parents/carers) if they are self or professionally diagnosed with what is perceived as a limiting condition such as anxiety or low mood. Having a condition can, in many situations, affirm a “why i can’t” approach to expectations, making it very hard to refocus thinking on how situations can be moved forward and success achieved despite the perceived barrier. In summary labels can often compound not resolve worries/concerns and barriers to success.

Whether or not a formal or suspected mental health diagnosis is in place it is an absolute expectation that a plan for success is created as quickly as possible so as to protect the child from the situation possibly deteriorating. School staff are happy to lead on or share the planning, this alongside parents/carers and professionals. Successful plans are based on:

- proactive and honest communication
- each party knowing and sticking to their agreed actions
- the school showing short-term and carefully coordinated adjustments
- the parent/carer both supporting their child but also holding them to account if they are not sticking to the agreed plan.

Working across so many students and with so many parents/carers we know that this approach works and works well. We also offer advice on referral routes and can directly liaise with a number of specialists in this area (above and beyond those that parents/carers can routinely access).

National data show that many young people are aware of how to access mental health support in school and crucially that absence itself is linked to worsening mental health outcomes.

In summary, while we will always listen and consider the individual student’s feelings, needs and diagnosis the default will and should not be withdrawal from school. From professional experience and learning we know with confidence that withdrawal (whether by the student themselves or by the parents supporting this) is counterproductive. It severs connections, reduces our ability to put in place early intervention, and turns vulnerability into deeper crisis.

## **6. School support to ensure regular attendance**

Staff will address attendance and punctuality concerns in a timely manner, through agreed processes. This may involve\* (as examples)

- communication with parents/carers
- meeting with students in school to discuss our concerns
- setting sanctions for the student (principally to make up missed time/work)
- meetings with parents/carers and/or externally involved professionals
- pastoral support and onward referrals to specific services
- liaison (with permission) with external medical professionals to evidence specific conditions/needs e.g. GPs.

The school reserves the right to request that parents/carers provide evidence from a medical qualified professional when a student’s absences are frequent and/or prolonged.

### **Evidencing very low attendance (<90%)**

The government classes all students with attendance less than 90% as a Persistent Absentee (PA), whatever the reason for their absence. These students are missing a minimum of one day a fortnight from school which is an enormous amount of missed learning and puts them at significant disadvantage compared to their peers.

Unless there is clear up to date medical evidence from a consultant to advise that school attendance may be limited or sporadic, parents/carers are expected to provide clear medical evidence for each absence. Failure to provide this in a timely way will automatically lead to onward referrals and the involvement of partner statutory agencies.

We are likely to need to speak professional to professional, this to ensure that we plan and enact any support and that it is clear, appropriate and all adults contribute to this.

We have a moral obligation to ensure each and every student receives the best possible education and will act in the best interests of the student to help them achieve this.

### **Student learning during extended periods of absence**

Please be aware that the school is not able to provide personalised work during absences

In exceptional situations (such as when an individual has been medically signed off by a consultant) feels well enough to access and complete work from home they should use:

- Their Arbor to keep up with homework
- Relevant google drive links for revision materials
- Any other specific departmental e-resources e.g. YouTube channels

Students can also (using their school email account only) contact individual teachers for support/advice and/or direction in relation to work to complete. Contact email addresses are on the school website.

For long term absences, supported by a hospital or CAMHS consultant letter stating the child is unfit for school and giving expected timelines for the absence, the school will refer to the local authority for consideration of short-term learning support package; this type of support remains a statutory expectation of local authorities.

In the most concerning cases where a student's attendance does not improve (and/or specific evidence\* is not provided that we adjudge to and fully explains the necessity for the student to be not in school), the school will make a direct referral to the WSCC Pupil Entitlement Team.

A referral such as this is for consideration of a fixed penalty notice or a non-attendance referral (formal legal action). The action determined by the Pupil Entitlement Team is solely their decision (see appendix B). No parental permission is required or expected in advance of this referral taking place; the referral is made as a direct result of a parent/carer not meeting their legal obligation to ensure regular attendance (see section 3 of this policy).

\* specific evidence from a GP, consultant and/or similarly medically qualified professional (normally from within the NHS).

## **7. Advice specific to holiday related absence**

The school, following government guidelines, will not grant permission for holidays in term time. Any holiday taken in term time will be recorded as an unauthorised absence ("G" coded) and could result in\*:

- A referral to the Pupil Entitlement Team who may choose to issue a fine (see information

- regarding fines in appendix c)
- A safeguarding referral (for example if we are unable to establish the location of the student during the period of absence)
- A police referral – if we feel the student could be at risk

As part of our safeguarding responsibilities we will, where we feel it is appropriate:

- Make unannounced home visits
- Contact other professionals/partner agencies
- and/or contact extended family should we not know where a student is
- Recode attendance marks, should it be ascertained that a student is on holiday (and a different reason for absence has been indicated by parents/carers)

## 8. Requesting an absence

We recognise that parents/carers may, at times, request absence from school for their son/daughter. This can/will only be granted if the school feels that the necessity for the absence is exceptional.

Exceptional circumstances\* are unlikely to include:

- Leaving early to go on a family trip/holiday or similar
- Going to a family wedding
- Taking part in multiple\* or extended sports/dance/drama related trips/events/competitions.

*\*regional and/or national level sports representation or similar are generally considered differently*

The term exceptional will be considered on an individual case by case basis. Part of the consideration will be the impact the potential absence is likely to have on the individual student's education. The headteacher's decision is final in relation to authorising exceptional absence.

Any requests for an absence from school must be made in advance by completing the Leave of Absence Request form (available on the school website and here

<https://durringtonhighschool.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Leave-of-Absence-Request-form.pdf> and returning it to student services before the date of absence commences.

## 9. Commonly used attendance codes

Below are some of the more commonly used attendance codes\*:

Code used	Meaning
"/" or "\"	Present (am and pm)
O	Unauthorised absence
G	Unauthorised holiday absence
L	Late
I	Ill
M	Medical appointment
E	Excluded
U	Unauthorised late

## 10. Elective Home Education

We believe that children learn better within the school environment. As part of the school children have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that is delivered by subject specialists. They also have many wider opportunities including the chance to socialise with their peers and the option to take part in clubs, activities and trips.

That said we also recognise that parents have the right to remove their child from the school. If a request is made to the school the legal position is that:

1. the school does not need the consent of both parents to remove the student. However it would be the expectation that the parent who the child resides with most of the time to make the request.
2. the request must be in writing (which includes email) and must state where the child will continue to be educated (e.g. at another school or electively home educated) and the date from which this different educational provision will start.

Any difference of opinion between the parents of the child and relating to whether or not a child is to be removed from the school should be discussed and resolved between the parents. The school will not become involved in or mediate any such discussion or communication.

## 11. References & Key school contacts

[School attendance and absence: Overview - GOV.UK](#)

[School absences - West Sussex County Council](#)

[Working together to improve school attendance - August 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

**Whole school attendance lead:** Mrs K Fuller (Assistant Headteacher)

**Deputy school attendance lead:** Ms B. Clarke (House leader, Attenborough)

**Strategic oversight from:** C. Woodcock (Co-Headteacher)

## Appendix A: The correlation between attendance and attainment

Attendance of students	Number of students who achieve a grade 5 in english and maths	Average GCSE grade of these students
96 – 100% attendance	over 7 in 10 students	5.6
90 – 95.9% attendance	less than 5 in 10 students	4.7
< 90% attendance	2 in 10 students	3.4

## Appendix B: Sources of information, support and guidance for parents/carers

### Medical support can be gained from\*:

- Your GP
- Local health clinics
- Calling 101 and/or visiting A&E in the case of adjudged emergency need
- Visiting a local pharmacist for general advice

### Emotional/wellbeing support can be explored\* via

- Your GP
- Local Find-It-out centres: <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/18969>
- Websites/apps including:

<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/support-for-families/search-for-family-activities-and-support/>

<https://calmharm.co.uk/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/blueice/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

### Via WSCC

<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/schools-and-colleges/school-attendance-and-behaviour/school-absences/>

## Appendix C: Implications if parents/carers don't ensure regular attendance and/or punctuality

Regular attendance is crucial in terms of student's life chances; the school has both a moral obligation and legal duty to act where this is not the case.

A concerning attendance is identified as where a student has:

- an attendance that remains under 96% despite intervention,
- frequent and/or prolonged absences totalling 10 or more unauthorised sessions (the same as 5 days off) over a 10 school-week period
- an attendance below 90% (classed as persistent absenteeism)

the school will act clearly and quickly.

The action taken could include one or more of a referral to\*:

- WSCC Pupil Entitlement Team for consideration of a fixed penalty notice or legal action.
- WSCC MASH, and/or
- contact with any other statutory agency for further action.

It is likely (depending on capacity and level of concern) that home visits will be made by staff if\*:

- a) There is no/very limited contact from parents/carers relating to a student not attending school
- b) The reasons given for absence raise a concern (lack of or potentially spurious)
- c) We are unable to speak/contact the student's main contact(s)

### **Penalty notices**

Unfortunately, we do have a minority of parents/carers that are prosecuted each year for failure to ensure regular attendance. Fines (currently £160 per parent/carer), and other sanctions are issued against parents/carers who are proven not to be fulfilling their legal responsibilities.

Under the new guidance that is statutory from 19th August 2024 the fixed penalty notice fines will be as follows:

- First issued fine is **£160 per parent per child**
- if a second find is issued this will be a further **£160 per parent per child**
- if a third referral (in the same three year period) is issued a mandatory process moves the case to the Magistrate's Court for prosecution. Magistrates can impose a fine of up to **£2500 per parent, per child.**

If a parent is found guilty of an offence, this is recorded as a criminal offence and will show on any DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks as 'failure to safeguard a child's education'.

### **Defence against Prosecution:**

The law sets out a number of defences and you must be able to evidence one of these in order to be found not guilty.

- The absence was authorised by the Head teacher
- The absence was due to sickness or an unavoidable cause. (This is generally held to be in relation to the child, not the parent and conclusive and up-to-date medical evidence has been provided to explain, in full, the reason for the absence)
- The absence was on any day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the parent belongs. The religious observance must be one which is recognised by the Department for Education.
- If your child has no fixed abode and you are engaged in a trade or business of such a nature as to require you to travel from place to place; that your child attends school as a registered pupil as regularly as the nature of that trade or business allows and that if your child is at least 6

#### **What is regarded as not a defence?**

The following are examples of reasons that would not be acceptable as defences;

- My child wouldn't do what I told them to do
- I've tried my hardest but my child won't go to school
- My child was too scared to go to school
- My child was bullied at school
- I had to look after my mother and couldn't take my child to school
- I didn't have any money to pay for petrol/bus fare.
- I was ill.

Prosecution is always a last resort. The school will work with parents and students to ensure regular attendance for all students. If you have concerns about your child's attendance, please contact his/her company team at the earliest opportunity to arrange a meet to discuss support.