

SUMMERHILL SCHOOL

Founded 1921



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School Attendance Policy for Day Pupils

September 2024

Preamble

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. Further, the school understands *'good attendance begins with school being somewhere pupils want to be'* (*Working together to improve school attendance, p.8*) which is why A S Neill first started the school with *'..... one main idea: to make the school fit the child – instead of making the child fit the school.'* (*'Summerhill' A.S. Neill. Pelican Books. 1968, p.20*)

Introduction

The statutory guidance *'Working together to improve school attendance'* (2024) states:

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that 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. (p.8)

Further,

Schools must ... take the attendance register at the start of each morning session of each school day and once during each afternoon session. On each occasion they must record whether each registered pupil is physically present in school or, if not, the reason they are not in school using the appropriate national attendance and absence codes(p.16/17)

Attendance and Punctuality

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. Poor punctuality is not acceptable.** If a child misses the start of the day, they may miss out on important play or lesson opportunities. Thus, 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). 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. Further, if the problem persists, the local authority will have to be notified, and ultimately legal interventions may be required if the support provided is not successful or engaged with.

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

Types of Absence

There are essentially two types of absence: **authorised** and **unauthorised**:

Authorised absence (or leave of absence) are mornings or afternoons or whole days 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 which prevents your child from attending.

Working together to improve school attendance (2024) states:

*All schools can grant a leave of absence (or authorise an absence) when a pupil needs to be absent from school with permission. All schools are expected to restrict leaves of absence to specific circumstances... (p.17) These include, **but are not limited to**, the following:*

Leave of absence for the purpose of attending a medical or dental appointment.

Parents are encouraged to make medical or dental appointments out of school hours. Where this is not possible, they should get the school's agreement in advance and the pupil should only be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary for the appointment. (p.81)

Leave of absence for the purpose of attending an interview for employment or for admission to another educational institution. (p.82)

Leave of absence for the purpose of studying for a public examination. (p.82) This does not include internal examinations such as mock GCSE's.

Leave of absence for exceptional circumstance. All schools are able to grant a leave of absence at their discretion. (p.84) 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.

In all the above cases a request for a leave of absence must be made in advance and in writing. In the case of a leave of absence for exceptional circumstance, the school will *judge each application individually considering the specific facts and circumstances and relevant*



background context behind each request. Where a leave of absence is granted, the school will determine the number of days the pupil can be absent from school. (p.84)

Only Zoë, (or in Zoë's absence, Will or Henry) may authorise such a request.

Generally, a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation would not constitute an exceptional circumstance. (p.84)

Illness (not medical or dental appointment). If your child is unable to attend due to illness (both physical and mental health related), parents should advise the school on the first day the child is unable to attend. (See Absence Procedures below for more details). All schools must inform the local authority if a pupil of compulsory school age misses or is expected to miss 15 days due to sickness.

For more information on this topic of granting leaves of absence, see *Working together to improve school attendance (2024), (Chapter 8 pages 76-91)*

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been given.

Some examples of where a leave of absence would **not** be granted and therefore considered **unauthorised** are:

- 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
- other leave of absence in term time which has not been agreed.

All schools must inform the local authority if a pupil of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly or misses 10 consecutive school days where their absence has been recorded as unauthorised.

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.

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.



Understanding barriers to attendance

Whilst any child may occasionally have time off school because they are ill, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school because they are experiencing normal but difficult emotions that make them nervous about attending school, such as worries about friendships, schoolwork, examinations or variable moods. It is important to note that these pupils are still expected to attend regularly and that 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.

Some pupils face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. These can include pupils who suffer from long-term physical or mental health 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.

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 (such as education supervision orders, prosecution, and parenting orders) may be taken.

Children missing in education

Summerhill School recognises that children missing education can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, sexual abuse and child sexual and criminal exploitation. Thus, 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 will 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."

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.

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.

Senior Attendance Champion

Since poor school attendance may be considered a safeguarding issue, it is Summerhill School's Designated Safeguarding Lead, Andrew Sturman, who takes on the role of **Senior Attendance Champion**. This means that, among other things, he will regularly monitor school attendance.

His contact details are:

Mobile: 07730672659 Email: andrew.s@summerhillschool.co.uk

Summerhill School is committed to having a robust attendance policy and system in place and it is Andrew, Will, Henry, and Zoë's responsibility, working with Lynn, and others, both inside and outside the school, to ensure that all Summerhill children receive the very best possible education.

Their contact details are:

Zoë Readhead

Mobile: 07903 938188 Email: zoe@summerhillschool.co.uk

Will Readhead

Mobile: 07904 296698 Email: will.l@summerhillschool.co.uk

Henry Readhead

Mobile: 07984 144598 Email: henry.r@summerhillschool.co.uk

Lynn

Office: 01728 830540 Email: office@summerhillschool.co.uk

A copy of this policy is on our website: www.summerhillschool.co.uk



A copy of *Working together to improve school attendance* (2024) can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

Summary

The school has a legal duty to promote and incentivise attendance and believes this is best achieved by providing a *democratic, self-governing community in which adults and students have complete equality and where a clear distinction is made between freedom and licence*. (*Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, p.4*)

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 statutory guidance entitled *Working together to improve school attendance* (2024)

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Next review due Sept 2025