

VICTORIA COLLEGE BELFAST
(incorporating Richmond Lodge School)

PUPIL ATTENDANCE POLICY

1. Rationale:

Victoria College is committed to promoting a positive ethos where pupils are encouraged to attend school regularly in order to achieve their full academic potential. The College will work with parents, pupils and outside agencies to secure this aim. Parents of pupils of compulsory school age have a legal duty to ensure that their children receive efficient, full-time education at school. The College is responsible for supporting the attendance of pupils and for responding to difficulties and issues which might lead to non-attendance. The College believes that schools which adopt a positive and proactive approach towards attendance matters and encourage parents to take an active role in the schooling of their children, can play a significant role in improving levels of attendance and punctuality and in reducing absenteeism.

2. Definition:

It is a legal requirement that schools will:

- be open to all pupils for 380 sessions each school year
- maintain attendance registers (either manual or computerised) in accordance with the relevant regulations
- accurately record and monitor all absenteeism and lateness
- clearly distinguish between absence which is authorised and absence which is unauthorised according to criteria provided by the Department of Education. It is the decision of the Principal as to whether or not an absence will be authorised
- submit termly absence returns through School Census and publish information relating to levels of attendance and absence and include details of these in the school's prospectus and annual report
- set annual targets to reduce absence and submit these targets in accordance with the relevant regulations.

3. Aims and Objectives:

This policy aims to ensure that there is an efficient system, known to all, for ensuring that pupils attending school have registered with their Form Teacher or signed the late book, and that reasons for non-attendance are made known to the College through the school office.

This policy will:

- give a high priority and value to attendance and punctuality and ensure that specific strategies are in place in order to achieve this
- ensure compliance with all relevant statutory requirements (particularly with regard to the maintenance of attendance registers and the setting of targets)
- ensure that clear attendance information is regularly communicated to parents through email, newsletters, parents' meetings or School comms
- ensure that parents are made aware of their legal responsibilities regarding their child's regular and punctual attendance
- collect and make effective use of attendance data to monitor progress/trends and set targets for improvement for individuals, classes, year groups and the whole school
- provide clear guidance to staff on the practice of registration and on such connected issues as the appropriate categorisation of absence
- recognise the crucial importance of early intervention and provide appropriate strategies
- identify a range of both proactive and reactive strategies to promote attendance and address absenteeism, especially persistent absenteeism
- establish procedures for reintegrating long-term absentees and pupils who may, for specific reasons, have been on a reduced timetable

4. Procedures:

Pupils should only be absent from school in the event of sickness or an event which for good reason makes it impossible to attend school. The events listed below do not automatically constitute grounds for being absent from school.

Holiday

Pupils should not be taken out of school for the purpose of going on holidays during term time. If a pupil goes on a holiday during term time the absence will be recorded as unauthorised.

Appointments/Absences in Advance

Dental and medical appointments should be made outside school hours or during the school holidays. In the event of such an appointment having to be made during the school day it will constitute an authorised absence, if school

is properly notified by means of an appointment card or a signed letter from a parent/guardian. Three days' notice must be given to the Head of Year, where possible, and an *absence in advance slip* completed and filed in the school office.

Other requests for absences such as driving lessons for Post 16 pupils will be authorised at the discretion of the Head of Year, Senior Teacher or Assistant Principal and will only be considered if the pupil has no timetabled classes.

Carers

The College may sanction limited absence for young carers until other arrangements can be made in exceptional circumstances. The Principal will set a time limit for such absences in consultation with the Vice Principal. The Principal may also seek advice from the EA or appropriate agency before coming to a decision.

Approved Educational Activities

The register must record whether the pupil is present, absent or attending an approved educational activity. Attendance and all forms of absence, i.e. education elsewhere should be recorded using the absence and attendance codes.

Study Leave

Study Leave should be applied only to **public examination** candidates during the examination period. Study leave **should not be used for** internal examinations, for extended periods or in advance of the commencement of the examination timetable. Study leave should only be granted, using this criterion, at the discretion of the College.

Decisions on study leave should be made by the Senior Leadership Team following the guidelines in Appendix F. Clarification in the application and granting of study leave has been provided at Registration Code: S in Appendix E.

Education Welfare Officer (EWO) Referrals

Referrals to EWOs are usually made by schools. There are however, occasions when other agencies/services or parents may make a referral.

Before accepting a referral from a school an EWO will expect the school to have first undertaken a number of steps to address the pupil's non-attendance.

The overwhelming majority of referrals to EWOs are made on the basis of non-attendance (referrals are occasionally taken in relation to child protection concerns, transport or school age employment issues).

Referrals will usually only be accepted in relation to absence which has not been authorised by the school. (Only in exceptional circumstances will referrals by the College be made in relation to authorised absence to the Education Welfare Service).

Referrals may be made when:

- a pattern of post-registration truancy is persisting despite the school's efforts to prevent it
- a pattern of irregular attendance has developed
- a period of non-attendance has begun, which has been noticed by the Form Teacher/ Head of Year checking individual attendance on (Schools Information Management System), (SIMS) or a subject teacher who has noticed a pattern of non-attendance over a two week period
- communication by the school to the parents has met with little or no response
- there is evidence of a lack of parental co-operation in ensuring a child's regular attendance
- a parent withdraws a pupil from school having expressed an intention to educate her otherwise than at school (Elective Home Education). A referral will always be made in this case
- a pupil is withdrawn from school by the parents who are moving to another area and the school does not have a confirmed destination school/provider where the child will resume his or her education (such pupils will be treated as "children missing education")
- a there are child protection concerns
- there are specific and identifiable welfare issues which are preventing a pupil from accessing education.

All referrals to the Education Welfare Officer are recorded on SIMS.

Religious Observance

The Principal will review each application reasonably in consultation with the Vice Principal. The College expects advance notice, since religious festivities are likely to be fixed well ahead.

Taking a Pupil off the Register

The Principal will authorise the taking of a pupil's name off the register in accordance with the current Department of Education regulations.

5. Roles and Responsibilities:

The Board of Governors will:

- approve the policy and any proposed changes
- receive reports on attendance from the Principal.

The Principal, in consultation with the Senior Leadership Team and Pastoral Team leaders, will:

- set attendance targets (97 %) in accordance with the School Development Plan and target-setting process
- monitor progress
- ensure that strategies are in place to promote and implement the policy throughout the College
- determine whether to authorise any proposed absences requested by parents, or record as unauthorised any absences that have taken place for which no request has been made
- notify parents as appropriate that if a pupil of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly his/her parents commit an offence
- initiate strategies to improve attendance
- liaise with EWO service over persistent absentees
- make an annual report with statistics to the Board of Governors.

The Vice Principal will

- ensure that the Assistant Principal/ Senior Teachers and Heads of Year implement the agreed procedures
- authorise referrals to the Education Welfare Officer when appropriate
- meet regularly with the Education Welfare Office
- ensure targets are being monitored.

The Vice Principal/ Senior Teachers will

- oversee the attendance arrangements
- work with Heads of Year to ensure the efficient running of the system and to identify pupils whose attendance is below 95%
- make periodic checks of the registers to monitor pupil absence
- make regular checks on absence notes and the reasons for absence to ensure that unaccounted absences are followed up
- deal with issues of inadequate registering and arrange appropriate training for staff
- liaise with the relevant Head of Year 13 and 14 to review the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) on an annual basis
- keep the Principal informed of the progress of the policy

Heads of Year will:

- in collaboration with Form Teachers identify (monthly) pupils whose attendance is below 97%
- monitor the recording of pupil absence and absence notes by the Form Teacher
- ensure that all registers are completed and up-to-date at the end of each term
- make regular checks on the efficiency of the registering;
- contact parents over pupil absences where appropriate
- make reports to the appropriate Senior Teacher on the efficiency of the system
- ensure that all suspected truancy is followed up and dealt with

Form Teachers will:

- ensure that pupils are registered accurately
- ensure that pupils bring absence notes
- inform the office by filling in the sheet in the register if a pupil is absent for three consecutive days to enable contact with parents
- ensure that every absence is accounted for with a note from a parent
- use the unauthorised absence code if no reason for absence has been provided within two weeks
- follow up cases of unaccounted for absence or unacceptable notes
- keep the Head of Year informed of any signs of suspected truancy
- inform the Head of Year of any possible underlying problems which might account for absences.

Subject Teachers will:

- check the attendance of pupils at their lessons
- inform the Form Teacher/ Head of Year of the names of pupils who are absent without notification.

Parents

Parents are responsible in law for ensuring that their children attend the school at which they are registered regularly, on time, properly dressed and in a fit condition to learn. Parents are also responsible for ensuring that their children stay at school once they have registered.

Parents can do a great deal to support the regular and punctual attendance of their children. They should:

- take an active interest in their child's school life and work
- attend parents' evenings and other school events
- ensure that their child completes their homework

- ensure that their child gets an adequate amount of sleep
- ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day
- ensure that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness
- always notify the school as soon as possible, preferably on the first morning of any absence
- confirm this in writing when the child returns to school
- avoid booking family holidays during term time
- talk to the school if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to attend
- inform the school of any planned absence for any reason including religious festivals.

Pupils are required to:

- attend regularly unless they are ill or have an authorised absence ('Attending regularly' means registering before the attendance register is closed for the session)
- bring an explanatory note of absence on the day of return to school
- discuss with their Head of Year any planned absences well in advance.

6. Review and Evaluation:

The policy will be reviewed at least once every three years by the Board of Governors. The policy will be kept under review by senior members of staff who will keep Governors informed of any difficulties that may arise.

Appendix A

Date (to be added)

Dear(personalise letter)

The College has set an attendance target of 97% and above in the School Development Plan, which is in line with the Department of Education's guidelines.

It is therefore a concern that your child's attendance is currently below 95% (see enclosed print-out). You should ensure that all absence notes have been provided to your child's Form Teacher.

Subject Teachers are concerned about the potential impact of poor attendance on your child's progress and I would appreciate your support in trying to improve their attendance rate. The College believes that your involvement contributes significantly to your child's education and I would like to thank you in advance for your active support in ensuring your child attends College and understands the significance of good attendance, being an indicator for academic performance.

I appreciate your co-operation in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Senior Teacher

Enc

Attendance letter 1

Appendix B

Date (to be added)

Dear (Personalise Letter)

Since the previous communication it has been noted that your child's attendance has not improved. This is a very serious concern since attendance links directly to academic performance and pastoral well-being.

This will be monitored for a period of four weeks and if there is no improvement a referral may be made to the Education Welfare Service.

I appreciate your support in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Senior Teacher

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Attendance letter 2

Appendix C

Date (to be added)

Dear (Personalise Letter)

We have already notified you of our concerns about your child's attendance at school. Disappointingly the situation does not appear to be improving so we have referred this matter to the Educational Welfare Officer.

The Education Welfare Officer will be able to offer support to your child and your family in order to encourage improved attendance, unless of course, the absenteeism is absolutely necessary.

Please do not hesitate to contact the College to discuss the matter if you wish.

Yours sincerely

Vice Principal

Attendance letter 3

Appendix D

ABSENCE CODES – GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

ABSENCE CODES: GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS CODE	DESCRIPTION	STATISTICAL MEANING	PAGE
/ \	Present: / = (AM): \ = (PM)	Present	2
A	Artistic Endeavour	Authorised Absence	3
B	Bereavement	Authorised Absence	4
C	Suspended	Authorised Absence	5
D	No reason provided for absence	Unauthorised Absence	6
F	Family Holiday (agreed)	Authorised Absence	7
G	Family Holiday (not agreed)	Unauthorised Absence	8
H	Other Absence	Unauthorised Absence	9
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointments)	Authorised Absence	10
L	Late (before registration closed)	Present	11
M	Medical/Dental Appointments	Authorised Absence	12
N	No reason yet provided for absence (temporary code only)	Unauthorised Absence	13
O	Other Exceptional Circumstances	Authorised Absence	14
P	Approved Sporting Activity	Approved Educational Activity	15
R	Religious Observance	Authorised Absence	16
S	Study Leave	Approved Educational Activity	17
U	Late (after registration closed)	Unauthorised Absence	18
V	Educational Visit	Approved Educational Activity	19
W	Work Experience	Approved Educational Activity	20
X	Only staff should attend	Attendance not required	21

Y	Exceptional Closure	Attendance not required	22
*	Not on roll	Attendance not required	23
#	Holiday for all	Attendance not required	24
!	No attendance required	Attendance not required	25
1	Alternative Education Provision (organised by the ELB)	Approved Educational Activity	26
2	Home/hospital tuition (organised by the ELB)	Approved Educational Activity	27
3	Elective Home Education	Attendance not Required	28
4	Pupil Referral Unit	Approved Educational Activity	29
5	Another mainstream school (under Entitlement Framework – EF)	Approved Educational Activity	30
6	Training Organisation (under EF)	Approved Educational Activity	31
7	FE College (under EF)	Approved Educational Activity	32
8	Intensive Support Learning Unit	Approved Educational Activity	33
9	CAMHS	Approved Educational Activity	34

Appendix E

Guidelines for reporting non attendance, non-compliance or disappearance for boarding pupils

In order for the College to comply with its sponsorship duties in accordance with the requirements of the UK Border Agency for Tier 4 migrants, the following procedures will be followed by the College in relation to its boarding pupils:

Absence with permission

If a boarder is going to miss any days out of the school term for any reason (including travel at the start or end of term) parents must email in advance for authorisation. It is a parent's right to take a pupil out of school during term time but some absences may not be authorised.

Absence without permission

- If a new boarder fails to enrol on her course within the excepted enrolment period (two weeks from the beginning of the new academic year) in liaison with the Head of Boarding, will immediately inform the Level 1 User (Executive Secretary) who will inform the UK Border Agency within 10 working days.
- If an existing boarder does not return to the boarding department at the beginning of the academic year or any holiday, parents will be contacted within a 24hr period. If no satisfactory explanation is given for the absence (i.e. missed flight) and the boarder has not returned within one week, in liaison with the Head of Boarding, will immediately inform the Level 1 User (Executive Secretary) who will inform the UK Border Agency within 10 working days.
- If a boarder discontinues her studies for any reason, including the completion of her course, in Liaison with the Head of Boarding, will immediately inform the Level 1 User (Executive Secretary) who will inform the UK Border Agency within 10 working days.
- If a Boarder has missed more than two weeks unexplained absence from her school course, in liaison with the Head of Boarding, will immediately inform the Level 1 User (Executive Secretary) who will inform the UK Border Agency within 10 working days.
- If a boarder's 'period of leave to remain in the United Kingdom' comes to an end, in liaison with the Head of Boarding, will immediately inform the Level 1 User (Executive Secretary) who will inform the UK Border Agency within 10 working days.

Review Procedure

These procedures will be reviewed on a regular basis and in light of any advice provided by the UK Border Agency.

Appendix F

Study Leave Guidelines

It is the policy of the College to allow a period of time for revision for pupils in Years 11 - 14 immediately prior to the start of their public examinations. Study leave is an authorised absence.

Study Leave should be applied only to **public examination** candidates during the examination period. This includes those pupils in Year 11 who are sitting external modules throughout the GCSE course. Year 11 pupils who have an examination scheduled for a morning session will be allocated a study leave session during the preceding afternoon. Year 11 pupils who have an examination scheduled for an afternoon session will be allocated a study leave session during the preceding morning.

Study leave **should not be used for** internal examinations, for extended periods or in advance of the commencement of the examination timetable. Study leave should only be granted, using this criterion, at the discretion of the College.

Arrangements for study leave:

Study leave begins for Year 12, 13 & 14 students in May or June on dates notified by the College. After those dates pupils are only required to be in school when they actually have examinations. The College will send an email notification to parents and guardians of the dates of commencement of study leave giving at least one week's notice.

School uniform

Pupils on study leave must wear full school uniform when coming into school. However, pupils may be on school premises in non-uniform clothes when the school is closed to all other pupils or when it has been agreed in advance to accommodate a particular activity.

Signing in when on study leave:

Pupils must sign in at the Cranmore Office. Teachers will be in available in classrooms when they are not teaching or invigilating. Pupils may use these rooms for private study and take advantage of teaching staff knowledge. The Library is available for Years 12, 13 and 14 for private study