



ATTENDANCE POLICY

Approved and signed by the Board of Trustees
JULY 2023

REVIEWED July 2023

ATTENDANCE POLICY

DISCOVERY MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

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1 Overview of Policy

This document acknowledges that Discovery Multi Academy Trust (the MAT) must apply their powers fairly and consistently with regards to pupil attendance.

Student attainment and achievement depend on regular presence in school. Any absence leads to missed learning opportunities and other experiences, and may cause difficulties with social relationships. It may also lead to a threat to the welfare of our pupils or to opportunities for anti-social behaviour.

Attendance is seen as a 'whole MAT issue'. Encouraging good attendance is the shared responsibility of the MAT, the parent/carer, the pupil, partners in the Local Authority and the Police. Parents/carers have a responsibility to see that their children receive appropriate education and it is the responsibility of the Local Authority to ensure that this happens.

2 Aims

We are committed to meeting our obligation with regards to school attendance through our Trust-wide approach, culture and ethos that values good attendance including:

- Promoting good attendance
- Reducing absence, including persistent and severe absence
- Ensuring that every pupil has access to the education to which they are entitled
- Acting early to address patterns of absence
- Building strong relationships with families to ensure pupils have the support in place to attend school.
- Maximising the achievement of all pupils.
- Supporting pupils to benefit fully from academic, personal and social opportunities, which are offered to them within the school.
- Promoting and supporting punctuality in attending school.

3 Legislation & Guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the [working together to improve school attendance](#) from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on [school attendance parental responsibility measures](#). These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- Part 6 of [The Education Act 1996](#)
- Part 3 of [The Education Act 2002](#)
- Part 7 of [The Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)
- [The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006 \(and 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016 amendments\)](#)
- [The Education \(Penalty Notices\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2013](#)

This policy also refers to the DfE's guidance on the school census, which explains the persistent absence threshold.

4 Roles & Responsibilities

4.1 The Trustees

The Trustees are responsible for:

- Promoting the importance of school attendance across the academies' policies and ethos
- Making sure the CEO and school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
- Regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data
- Monitoring attendance figures for the academies
- Making sure staff receive adequate training on attendance
- Ensuring that a Trust Attendance Policy is in place and holding the CEO and Heads of School to account for the implementation of this policy
- Appointing a Local Advisory Board (LAB) member with specific responsibility for attendance.

4.2 The Heads of School

The Heads of School are responsible for:

- Implementation of this policy at the academy
- Monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to the CEO and Trustees
- Supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual pupils
- Monitoring the impact of any implemented attendance strategies

4.3 The Trust Attendance Lead

The designated senior leader is responsible for:

- Monitoring and analysing attendance data (see section 8)
- Benchmarking attendance data to identify areas of focus for improvement
- Evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes
- Leading attendance across the MAT
- Offering a clear vision for attendance improvement
- Devising specific strategies to address areas of poor attendance identified through data
- Supporting Heads of School with parent/carer meetings to discuss attendance issues identified through data
- Delivering targeted intervention and support to pupils and families
- Carrying out home visits where any pupil we expect to attend school does not attend, or to support families with attendance issues
- Working with the Local Authority to tackle persistent absence

The designated senior leader responsible for attendance (the Trust Attendance Lead) can be contacted via the MAT Central Office.

4.4 Class Teachers

Class teachers are responsible for recording attendance on a daily basis, using the correct codes, and submitting this information to the school office during the morning and afternoon registration period.

4.5 School Administrators/Office Staff

School Administrators/Office Staff will:

- Take calls and speak to parents/carers about absence on a day-to-day basis and record it on the school system
- Transfer calls from/refer parents to the Head of School in order to provide them with more detailed support on attendance

4.6 Parents/Carers

Parents/carers are expected to:

- Make sure their child attends every day and on time
- Call the school to report their child's absence before 9am on the day of the absence (and each subsequent day of absence), and advise when they are expected to return
- Provide the school with more than one emergency contact number for their child
- Ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day

4.7 Pupils

Pupils are expected to:

- Attend school every day on time
- Where possible, share any concerns that they have about school with a trusted member of staff to avoid attendance becoming an issue

5 Recording Attendance

5.1 Attendance Register

The MAT will keep attendance registers and place all pupils onto this register. The academies are required to take an attendance register at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. Taking the register is a key part of the school day and should be seen as such by all staff, pupils and parents/carers. School session times may vary slightly in each academy across the MAT.

We will take our attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark whether every pupil is:

- Present
- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Any amendment to the attendance register will include:

- The original entry
- The amended entry
- The reason for the amendment
- The date on which the amendment was made
- The initials of the person who made the amendment

See Appendix I for the DfE Attendance Codes.

We will also record:

- For pupils of compulsory school age, whether the absence is authorised or not
- The nature of the activity if a pupil is attending an approved educational activity
- The nature of circumstances where a pupil is unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

We will keep every entry on the attendance register for 3 years after the date on which the entry was made.

Pupils must arrive in school by 8:45am on each school day as this is when the school day starts. The register for the first session will be taken at 8:55am and will be kept open until 9:15am. After lunch, the register for the second session will be taken and will be kept open for 15 minutes.

5.2 Unplanned Absence

The pupil's parent/carer must notify the school of the reason for the absence on the first day of an unplanned absence by 9am, or as soon as practically possible by calling the school admin/office staff (see also section 8).

When parents/carers notify us of their child's absence, it is important that they provide us with details of the reason for their absence.

We will mark absence due to illness as authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask the pupil's parent/carer to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents/carers will be notified of this in advance.

5.3 Planned Absence

Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorised as long as the pupil's parent/carer notifies the school in advance of the appointment.

However, we encourage parents/carers to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

The pupil's parent/carer must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence. Go to Section 6 to find out which term-time absences the school can authorise.

Parents can request a leave of absence by completing an Absence Request Form, which is available from the school office and can also be found on the school website.

5.4 Lateness and Punctuality

A pupil who arrives late:

- Before the register has closed (before 9:15am) will be marked as late, using the appropriate code (i.e. L).
- After the register has closed (i.e. after 9:15) will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code (i.e. U).
- Where there have been persistent incidents of lateness, parents/carers will be contacted by their class teacher advising them of the concerns and the school will provide opportunities for parents/carers to seek support and advice to address these issues including from other staff members e.g. a Family Support Worker (FSW) or senior member of staff.

5.5 Following up Unexplained Absence

Where any pupil we expect to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will:

- Call the pupil's parent/carer on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason. If the school cannot reach any of the pupil's emergency contacts, the school may contact Social Care if the family are involved with this service or if there are Child Protection concerns
- Identify whether the absence is approved or not
- Identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained – this will be no later than 5 working days after the session
- Call the parent/carer on each day that the absence continues without explanation to ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary. If absence continues, the school will consider involving other members of staff to support and will follow the pupil missing in education plan in the Missing Pupil Policy

5.6 Reporting to Parents/Carers

The school will regularly inform parents about their child's attendance and absence levels in their annual school report. Schools may also contact parents and advise them of their pupil's attendance throughout the year. This may be through individual letters, meetings, attendance rewards/celebrations.

6 Authorised & Unauthorised Absence

It is vital that all staff within the MAT adhere to the same criteria when deciding whether or not to authorise an absence. Absences should be recorded in accordance with the Attendance Codes issued by the DfE (Appendix 1) and held within the SIMS database.

6.1 Approval for term-time absence

The Head of School will only grant a leave of absence to a pupil during term time if they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. A leave of absence is granted at the Head of School's discretion, including the length of time the pupil is authorised to be absent for.

It will be the decision of the Head of School as to what might constitute exceptional circumstances and each request for term time absence will be considered on an individual basis, taking the impact on the child's education into account and the circumstances and relevant context behind the request (see Appendix 2).

The Head of School will also look very carefully at the child's previous attendance record and should there be concerns, for example, should the child's average attendance be below 95% it is highly unlikely that the Head of School will agree to authorise any further absence.

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated before the absence, and in accordance with any 'Leave of Absence Request' form, accessible via the school office or website. The Head of School may require evidence to support any request for leave of absence.

Valid reasons for **authorised absence include:**

- Illness and medical/dental appointments (see sections 5.2 and 5.3 for more detail)
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart.
- Traveller pupils travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh gypsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) and circus people, bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school, but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision.
- The pupil is excluded and appropriate information and paperwork have been forwarded to the parent.
- A holiday in term time where special/exceptional circumstances are given at the time of application (evidence may be required) and these are accepted.

Note:

- The absence of pupils taking part in appropriately supervised educational activities outside of the academy is recorded as 'approved educational activities' as appropriate. This is equivalent to 'present' for performance table purposes.
- It is vital that if a pupil attends an off-site provision, that the off-site provision informs the school of the child's attendance every day they are planned to attend, to allow the policy to be followed (whether they are educated on-site or off).
- Any pupil who does not attend a provision off-site and is not attending school has to be marked as absent in the school register.

6.2 Children Missing in Education

Children missing in education are children of a compulsory school age (5-16 years old) who are not on a school roll, being educated otherwise (e.g. at home, privately, or in alternative provision) and who have been out of educational provision for a substantial period of time (usually agreed as four weeks or more). Information about the Trust's procedure to support pupils who may be missing in education can be found in the Trust's Missing Pupil Policy.

6.3 Legal Sanctions

The Local Authority can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age.

If issued with a fine, or penalty notice, each parent must pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the Local Authority.

Penalty notices can be issued by a Local Authority Officer or the police.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice may take into account:

- The number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year
- One-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission
- Where an excluded pupil is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason

If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice

7 Strategies for Promoting Good Attendance

We maintain and promote good attendance and punctuality through:

- The MAT will offer an environment in which pupils feel valued and welcome. Each academy's ethos must demonstrate that pupils feel that their presence in school is important, that they will be missed when they are absent/late and that follow up action will always be taken. Early intervention is often the key to preventing more frequent absences.
- A varied and flexible curriculum will be offered to pupils. Every effort is made to ensure that learning tasks match pupil's needs.
- Raising awareness of attendance and punctuality issues among all staff, parents and pupils.
- Ensuring that parents understand the responsibility placed on them for making sure their child attends school regularly and punctually.
- Equipping children with the life skills needed to take responsibility for good school attendance and punctuality appropriate to the child's age and development.
- Pupils who are absent through sickness/other reason for any extended period of time will (where appropriate) have work sent home to them, support offered and other professionals involved and will be reintegrated back into school upon their return.
- Maintaining effective means of communication with parents, pupils, staff and Trustees on school attendance matters.
- Developing and implementing procedures for identifying, reporting and reviewing cases of poor attendance and persistent lateness.
- Supporting pupils who have been experiencing any difficulties at home or at school, which are preventing good attendance. This may include offering interventions (where possible) through the schools helping Us Thrive (HUT) classroom.
- Developing and implementing procedures to follow up non-attendance at school.
- The Trust Attendance Lead will have regular meetings with the Heads of School in order to identify and support those pupils, and their families, who are experiencing attendance difficulties.
- Good attendance will be praised appropriately and rewards given. School staff are aware of Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and strategies which can be put in place to support this, involving other professionals if necessary.

8 Attendance Monitoring

- Each academy follows the plan below to support and monitor attendance.

DISCOVERY MAT	
Strategies and Actions to Support and Monitor Good Attendance & Punctuality	
Strategies to Support Good Attendance & Punctuality	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly attendance figures for each class are shared by the academies on their newsletters. Parents have access to key information about the importance of good attendance and punctuality through the Trust's Attendance Leaflet, which is available from the school office and on the school's website and through the school's social media accounts. A Family Support Worker (FSW) is available in each school to support parents/carers with attendance issues and concern. The academy InCos are aware of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and what support can be put in place to support children experiencing this. Appropriate letters will be sent and/or meetings with parents arranged in order to support positive attendance. 	
Thresholds	Monitoring Actions
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the start of the academic year all parents are invited to 'Welcome Meetings' where the importance of attendance and punctuality is discussed by Class Teachers/Team Leaders/Head of School. 'Meet the Teacher Meetings' take place in Term 1 – where attendance and punctuality are discussed along with how children have settled into their new class and school year. Attendance and punctuality are monitored routinely by Class Teachers. Rewards for positive attendance shared with pupils weekly and/or termly. These are determined by each academy individually. Transitions are carefully planned to support those children who may find change difficult.
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class Teachers share any attendance and punctuality concerns weekly in Team Meetings Team Leaders then share these concerns from the Team Meetings in the weekly Middle Leadership Team (MLT) Meetings. Initial concerns will then involve a conversation between the Class Teacher and a pupil's parents/carer.
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every three weeks whole school attendance and punctuality are monitored by the Head of School, along with the School Administrator and Family Support Worker (FSW). Where there are concerns, or if any pupil is showing 5/8 indicators of attendance ACEs, then further conversations will be had by the Team Leader or FSW, Attendances ACEs can be seen in Appendix 3. At the start of Term 2 any pupils with attendance <96% are invited to an attendance meeting with the Head of School. The Head of School will complete an Individual Attendance Plan (see Appendix 4). Pupils with an attendance below <96% continue to be monitored and reviewed every 6 weeks (at the beginning of Term 2, Term 3 and Term 4). Attendance and punctuality will continue to be monitored routinely by Class Teachers and concerns shared in weekly Team Meetings.
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Trust Attendance Lead will review any Individual Attendance Plans for pupils with attendance concerns, to determine next steps for the family and the school. The Trust Attendance Lead may then refer a pupil and their family to the Early Help Team at the Local Authority.

When this plan has been followed, and if a pupil's absence is severely below expected levels, then the Trust Attendance Lead and Local Authority may become involved. The school will be supported by the Local Authorities' Early Help Offer to determine next steps.

8.1 Monitoring Attendance

The school will:

- Monitor attendance and absence data weekly, half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual pupil level.
- Identify whether or not there are particular groups of children whose absences may be a cause for concern

Pupil-level absence data will be collected each term and compared at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics. The Trust Senior Leaders e.g. Heads of School/Trust Attendance Lead will liaise with the LAB members to compare attendance data to the national average, and share this with the Trustees.

8.2 Analysing Attendance

The school will:

- Analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify pupils or cohorts that need additional support with their attendance, and use this analysis to provide targeted support to these pupils and their families.
- Look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns.

8.3 Using Data to Improve Attendance

The school will:

- Provide regular attendance reports to Class Teachers, Team Leaders, Head of School, Trust Attendance Lead to facilitate discussions with pupils and families.
- Use data to monitor and evaluate the impact of any interventions put in place in order to modify them and inform future strategies

8.4 Reducing Persistent and Severe Absence

Persistent absence is where a pupil misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a pupil misses 50% or more of school.

The school will:

- Use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence
- Hold regular meetings with the parents of pupils who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable, or are persistently or severely absent, to discuss attendance and engagement at school
- Provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance
- If absence is severe then the Trust Attendance Lead and Local Authority may become involved.
- The school will be supported by the Local Authority - Early Help Offer.

9 Monitoring Arrangements

This policy will be reviewed as guidance from the Local Authority or DfE is updated, and as a minimum every three years by the Trust CEO. At every review, the policy will be approved by the Trust board.

10 Links with Other Policies

- Managing and Supporting Positive Behaviour Policy
- Missing Pupil Policy
- SEND and Inclusion Policy

Appendix I: DfE Attendance Codes

The following codes are taken from the DfE's guidance on school attendance.

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	Pupil is present at morning registration
\	Present (pm)	Pupil is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	Pupil arrives late before register has closed
B	Off-site educational activity	Pupil is at a supervised off-site educational activity approved by the school
D	Dual registered	Pupil is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
J	Interview	Pupil has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
P	Sporting activity	Pupil is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
V	Educational trip or visit	Pupil is on an educational visit/trip organised, or approved, by the school
W	Work experience	Pupil is on a work experience placement

Code	Definition	Scenario
Authorised absence		
C	Authorised leave of absence	Pupil has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances
E	Excluded	Pupil has been excluded but no alternative provision has been made
H	Authorised holiday	Pupil has been allowed to go on holiday due to exceptional circumstances
I	Illness	School has been notified that a pupil will be absent due to illness
M	Medical/dental appointment	Pupil is at a medical or dental appointment
R	Religious observance	Pupil is taking part in a day of religious observance
S	Study leave	Year 11 pupil is on study leave during their public examinations
T	Gypsy, Roma and traveller absence	Pupil from a traveller community is travelling, as agreed with the school
Unauthorised absence		
G	Unauthorised holiday	Pupil is on a holiday that was not approved by the school
N	Reason not provided	Pupil is absent for an unknown reason (this code should be amended when the reason emerges, or replaced with code O if no reason for absence has been provided after a reasonable amount of time)
O	Unauthorised absence	School is not satisfied with reason for pupil's absence
U	Arrival after registration	Pupil arrived at school after the register closed

Code	Definition	Scenario
X	Not required to be in school	Pupil of non-compulsory school age is not required to attend
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances	School site is closed, there is disruption to travel as a result of a local/national emergency, or pupil is in custody
Z	Pupil not on admission register	Register set up but pupil has not yet joined the school
#	Planned school closure	Whole or partial school closure due to half-term/bank holiday/INSET day

Appendix 2: Plymouth City Council Guidance on Exceptional Circumstances

The following is a guide as to what could/could not be exceptional circumstances for approving a child's absence from school:

Exceptional circumstances:

- A specified, limited period may be granted when a family needs to spend time together because of an immediate family member's bereavement, crisis or serious illness.
- Funeral of immediate family member
- Religious observance
- Transport was not provided by the LA when it should have been
- Children of service personnel about to go on deployment (permission would be considered as long as the request is accompanied by a letter from the Commanding Officer)
- One day of absence could be authorised for a wedding of an immediate family member and the invitation has been provided as evidence
- One off sporting events/performing arts competitions, if the child is participating and is at county standard or above and a letter has been provided from the performing arts/sports regional governing body as evidence
- One day of absence could be authorised for an immediate family member's graduation ceremony/passing out parade
- Medical appointments (parents/carers should be encouraged to arrange non-urgent medical appointments outside of school hours when possible). If the medical appointment is during the school day, evidence must be provided. Schools should not authorise a whole day's absence for a medical appointment that occurs in the morning – the child would be expected to return to school in the afternoon, and vice versa.

Appendix 3: Attendance ACEs

1. Ever Persistently Absent
2. Pupil previously suspended
3. Evidence of previous unauthorised absence
4. Pupil previously known to social care (CIN, CP)
5. Pupils who have been absent within the first week of term
6. Pupil with EHCP
7. Pupil previously excluded
8. Pupil with SEND

Appendix 4: Individual Attendance Plan

Name:		DOB:	
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Date of meeting:	In attendance:

Attendance Zone	Progress of 3%	Progress of 5%	Progress of 8%+
Review 1			
Review 2			
Review 3			

What are the reasons for absence? (please tick)			
Medical appointments	✓	Illness	✓
Parent Mental Health	✓	Truancy / lesson avoidance	✓
No Reason Provided	✓	Student Mental Health	✓
Behaviour / exclusions	✓	Bullying	✓
Historic Attendance Issues	✓	Peer/Relationship Issues	✓

Parent having difficulties getting child to school	✓	School based anxiety	✓
Other:		Reason:	

What actions have been taken? (please tick)			
Traffic Light Monitoring	✓	Timetable changes	✓
Student Interview	✓	Family Support offered	✓
Telephone calls home	✓	Rewards & Recognition	✓
Meeting with parent/carer	✓	Early Help	✓
EWO referral	✓	Attendance improvement meeting	✓
Legal Action			
Group work			
Other:			

Historic Attendance:								
Nursery (1)	Nursery (2)	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6

Historic Attendance Indicators (Select relevant indicators):

Ever Persistently Absent	✓	Pupil previously suspended	✓
Evidence of previous unauthorised absence	✓	Pupil previously known to social care	✓
Pupils absent within the first week of term	✓	Pupil with EHCP	✓
Pupil previously excluded	✓	Pupil with SEND	✓

Information Shared (including views of the parent/child, where possible):

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SMART Target:	Strategies	Monitoring Milestones	Outcome
1.			
2.			

Signed:

Head of School			
Child:			
Parent 1:		Parent 2:	