

Attendance and Absence Policy

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# Statement of intent

Communication Specialist College Doncaster believes that in order to facilitate teaching and learning, good attendance is essential. Students cannot achieve their full potential if they do not regularly attend college.

We understand that barriers to attendance are complex, and that some students find it harder than others to attend college; therefore, we will continue to prioritise cultivating a safe and supportive environment, as well as strong and trusting relationships with students and families.

We are committed to:

* Promoting and modelling high attendance and its benefits.
* Ensuring equality and fairness for all.
* Intervening early and working with other agencies to ensure the health and safety of our students.
* Building strong relationships with families to overcome barriers to attendance.
* Working collaboratively with other agencies in the area.
* Ensuring parents follow the framework set in section 7 of the Education Act 1996, which states that the parent of every child of compulsory college age shall cause them to receive efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude, and to any SEND they may have, either by regular attendance at college or otherwise.
* Ensuring our attendance policy is clear and easily understood by all staff, parents and students.
* Regularly monitoring and analysing attendance and absence data to identify students or cohorts that require more support.

The college’s pastoral department can be contacted on 01302 386700 or Lynsey Coates and can be contacted via [lynsey.coates@cscd.ac.uk](mailto:lynsey.coates@cscd.ac.uk) Staff, and students will be expected to contact the attendance officer for queries or concerns about attendance.

# 1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

* Education Act 1996
* Equality Act 2010
* The Education (Student Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended)
* DfE (2023) ‘Working together to improve school attendance’.
* DfE (2023) ‘Children missing education’.
* DfE (2023) ‘Keeping children safe in education 2023’.

This policy operates in conjunction with the following college policies:

* Complaints Procedures Policy
* Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
* Behaviour Policy
* SEND Policy
* Supporting Students with Medical Conditions Policy
* Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy
* Attendance Officer Home Visit Policy

# 2. Definitions

The following definitions apply for the purposes of this policy:

**Absence:**

* Not attending college for any reason

**Authorised absence:**

* An absence for sickness for which the college has granted leave.
* Medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall during college time, for which the college has granted leave.
* Religious or cultural observances for which the college has granted leave.
* An absence due to a family emergency.
* Mental Health issues that have been diagnosed by a professional.

**Unauthorised absence:**

* Parents keeping children off college unnecessarily or without reason.
* Refusing to engage in class or with
* Leaving site without permission.
* Absences which have never been properly explained
* Absence due to shopping, looking after other children or birthdays.
* Absence due to day trips and holidays in term-time which have not been agreed.

**Persistent absence (PA):**

* Missing 10 percent or more of education across the year for any reason

# 3. Roles and responsibilities

The governing board has overall responsibility for:

* Monitoring the implementation of this policy and all relevant procedures across the college.
* Promoting the importance of good attendance through the college’s ethos and policies.
* Arranging attendance training for all relevant staff that is appropriate to their role.
* Working with the SLT to set goals for attendance and providing support and challenge around delivery against those goals.
* Ensuring that this policy, as written, does not discriminate on any grounds including, but not limited to, ethnicity/national origin, culture, religion, gender, disability or sexual orientation.
* Handling complaints regarding this policy as outlined in the college’s Complaints Procedures Policy.
* Having regard to ‘Keeping children safe in education’ when making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The Pastoral Manager is responsible for:

* The day-to-day implementation and management of this policy and all relevant procedures across the college.
* Ensuring all parents are aware of the college’s attendance expectations and procedures.
* Ensuring that every student has access to full-time education and will act as early as possible to address patterns of absence.
* The overall strategic approach to attendance in college.
* Informing the LA of any student being deleted from the admission and attendance registers.

Staff are responsible for:

* Following this policy and ensuring students do so too.
* Ensuring this policy is implemented fairly and consistently.
* Modelling good attendance behaviour.
* Using their professional judgement and knowledge of individual students to inform decisions as to whether any welfare concerns should be escalated.
* Where designated, taking the attendance register at the relevant times during the college day.

The college management team are responsible for:

* Developing a clear vision for improving attendance.
* Monitoring attendance and the impact of interventions.
* Analysing attendance data and identifying areas of intervention and improvement.
* Communicating with students and parents with regard to attendance.
* Following up on incidents of persistent poor attendance.

Parents are responsible for:

* Providing accurate and up-to-date contact details.
* Providing the college with more than one emergency contact number.
* Updating the college if their details change.
* The attendance of their young person at college.
* Promoting good attendance with their young person.

Students are responsible for:

* Attending their lessons and any agreed activities when at college.
* Arriving punctually to lessons when at college.

# 4. Attendance expectations

The college has high expectations for students’ attendance and punctuality and ensures that these expectations are communicated regularly to parents and students.

Students will be expected to:

* Attend college every day they are required to be at college, for the full day.
* Attend college punctually.
* Attend every timetabled lesson.

The college day starts at 9:00am, and students will be in their classroom, ready to begin lessons at this time; therefore, students will be expected to be on the college site by 8:55am. Students will have a morning break at 10:50am, which will last until 11:50am, and a lunch break at 12:00pm, which will last until 1:00pm – students will be expected to have returned from each break and be ready to recommence learning at the stated times.

Students will be encouraged to communicate any concerns related to attendance and absence as soon as possible to the relevant member of staff.

# 5. Absence procedures

Parents will be required to contact the college office via telephone before 9:00am on the first day of their student’s absence – they will be expected to provide an explanation for the absence and an estimation of how long the absence will last, e.g.one college day.

Where a student is absent, and their parent has not contacted the college by the close of the morning register to report the absence, a member of the pastoral team will contact the parent via telephone call as soon as is practicable on the first day that the student does not attend college.

The college will always follow up any absences in order to:

* Ascertain the reason for the absence.
* Ensure the proper safeguarding action is being taken.
* Identify whether the absence is authorised or not.

The college will not request medical evidence in most circumstances where a student is absent due to illness; however, the college reserves the right to request supporting evidence where there is genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the illness.

If a student’s attendance drops below 80 percent, the attendance officer will arrange a formal meeting with the student and their parent.

# 7. Authorising parental absence requests

Parents will be required to request certain types of absence in advance. All requests for absence will be handled by a pastoral manager – the decision to grant or refuse the request will be at the sole discretion of the pastoral manager, taking the best interests of the student and the impact on the student’s education into account. The manager’s decision is not subject to appeal; however, the college will be sympathetic to requests for absence by parents and will not deny any request without good reason.

**Leave of absence**

The college will only grant a student a leave of absence in exceptional circumstances. In order to have requests for a leave of absence considered, the college will expect parents to contact the pastoral manager in writing at least two weeks prior to the proposed start date of the leave of absence, providing the reason for the proposed absence and the dates during which the absence would be expected to occur.

Any requests for leave during term time will be considered on an individual basis and the student’s previous attendance record will be taken into account. Where the absence is granted, the pastoral manager will determine the length of time that the student can be away from college. The college is not likely to grant leaves of absence for the purposes of family holidays.

Requests for leave will not be granted in the following circumstances:

* Immediately before and during assessment periods
* When a student’s attendance record shows any unauthorised absence
* Where a student’s authorised absence record is already above 10 percent for any reason

**Illness and healthcare appointments**

Students and parents will be expected to make medical or dental appointments outside of college hours wherever possible.

**Religious observance**

Students will be expected to request absence for religious observance at least two weeks advance.

The college will only accept requests from students for absence on grounds of religious observance for days that are exclusively set apart for religious observance by the relevant religious body.

The college may seek advice from the religious body in question where there is doubt over the request.

**Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence**

Where a student belongs to a community covered by this code and is travelling for occupational purposes, the student will be expected to request a leave of absence at least two weeks in advance. Absences will not be granted for students from these communities under this code for reasons other than travel for occupational purposes.

# 8. SEND- and health-related absences

The college recognises that students with SEND and/or health conditions, including mental health issues, may face greater barriers to attendance than their peers, and will incorporate robust procedures to support students who find attending college difficult.

In line with the SEND Policy and Supporting Students with Medical Conditions Policy, the college will ensure that reasonable adjustments are made for disabled students to reduce barriers to attendance, in line with any EHC plans or IHPs that have been implemented. The college will secure additional support from external partners to help bolster attendance where appropriate.

Where the college has concerns that a student’s non-attendance may be related to mental health issues, parents will be contacted to discuss the issue and whether there are any contributory factors to their student’s lack of attendance. Where staff have a mental health concern about a student that is also a safeguarding concern, they will inform the DSL and the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy will be followed. All students will be supported with their mental health in accordance with the college’s Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy.

If a student is unable to attend college for long periods of time due to their health, the college will:

* Inform the LA if a student is likely to be away from the college for more than 15 college days.
* Provide the LA with information about the student’s needs, capabilities and programme of work.
* Help the student reintegrate at college when they return.
* Make sure the student is kept informed about college events and clubs.
* Encourage the student to stay in contact with other students during their absence.

The college will incorporate an action plan to help any students with SEND and/or health issues cope with the stress and anxiety that attending college may cause them. Such plans will be regularly monitored and reviewed until the student is attending college as normal and there has been signs of significant improvement.

To support the attendance of students with SEND and/or health issues, the college will consider:

* Holding termly meetings to evaluate any implemented reasonable adjustments.
* Incorporating a pastoral support plan.
* Using an internal or external specialist.
* Enabling a student to have a reduced timetable.
* Ensuring a student can have somewhere quiet to spend lunch and breaktimes.
* Implementing a system whereby students can request to leave a classroom if they feel they need time out.
* Temporary late starts or early finishes.
* Phased returns to college where there has been a long absence.
* Small group work or on-to-one lessons.
* Tailored support to meet their individual needs.

# 9. Absence in exceptional circumstances

Exceptional circumstances will include when a student is unable to attend because:

* Transport provided by the college, LA or parent is not available and the student’s home is not within walking distance.
* There has been widespread disruption to travel services which has prevented the student from attending.
* The student is in custody and will be detained for less than four months.

# 12. Attendance intervention

In order to ensure the college has effective procedures for managing absence, the attendance officer, supported by the SLT, will:

* Establish a range of specific, evidence-based interventions to address barriers to attendance.
* Monitor the implementation and quality of escalation procedures and seek robust evidence of the escalation procedures that work.
* Attend or lead attendance reviews in line with escalation procedures.
* Establish robust escalation procedures which will be initiated before absence becomes a problem by:
  + Sending letters to parents.
  + Having a weekly tutor review.
  + Engaging with LA attendance teams.
  + Using fixed penalty notices.
  + Creating attendance clinics.

The college will use attendance data, in line with the ‘[Monitoring and analysing absence](#_Monitoring_and_review_1)’ section of this policy, to develop specific strategies to improve attendance where patterns of absence are emerging. These strategies will be developed on a case-by-case basis and will consider the particular needs of the students whom the intervention is designed to target.

# 13. Working with parents to improve attendance

The college will work to cultivate strong, respectful relationships with parents and families and work to build trust and engagement. Open and honest communication will be maintained with students and their families about the expectations of college life, attendance and performance so that they understand what to expect and what is expected of them. The college will liaise with other agencies working with students and their families to support attendance, e.g. social services.

The college will ensure that there are two sets of emergency contact details for each student wherever possible to ensure the college has additional options for getting in touch with adults responsible for a student where the student is absent without notification or authorisation.

The college will ensure that parents are aware of their legal duty to ensure that their child attends college regularly and to facilitate their student’s legal right to a full-time education – parents will be made aware that this means their child must attend college every day that it is open, save for in certain circumstances, e.g. sickness or absences that have been authorised by a manager in advance. The college will regularly inform parents about their student’s levels of attendance, absence and punctuality, and will ensure that parents are aware of the benefits that regular attendance at college can have for their child educationally, socially and developmentally.

If a pattern of absence becomes problematic, the attendance officer will work collaboratively with the student and their parents to improve attendance by addressing the specific barriers that prevent the student from being able to attend college regularly. The college will always take into consideration the sensitivity of some of the reasons for student absence and will approach families to offer support rather than immediately reach for punitive approaches.

Where these barriers are related to the student’s experience in college, e.g. bullying, the attendance officer will work with the pastoral manager and any relevant college staff, e.g. the DSL and SENCO, to address this. Where the barriers are outside of the college’s control, e.g. they are related to issues within the student’s family, the attendance officer will liaise with any relevant external agencies or authorities, e.g. children’s social care or the LA, and will encourage parents to access support that they may need.

# 14. PA

There are various groups of students who may be vulnerable to high absence and PA, such as:

* Children in need
* LAC
* Young carers
* Students who are eligible for FSM
* Students with EAL
* Students with SEND
* Students who have faced bullying and/or discrimination.

The college will ensure it provides support to students at risk of PA, in conjunction with all relevant external authorities where necessary.

The college will use a number of methods to help support students at risk of PA to attend college. These include:

* Meeting with the student and their parent to discuss patterns of absence, barriers to attendance, and any other problems they may be having.
* Establishing plans to remove barriers and provide additional support.
* Leading regular check-ins to review progress and assess the impact of support.
* Making regular contact with the student’s parent to discuss progress.
* Considering what support for re-engagement might be needed, including with regard to additional vulnerability.

The college will focus particularly on students who have rates of absence over 50 percent and will work with the LA and other partners to engage all relevant services needed to identify and address the wider barriers to attendance these students are facing.

Where a student at risk of PA is also at increased risk of harm, the college will work in conjunction with all relevant authorities, e.g. social services, to support the student in line with the college’s duty of care. The college will also bear in mind that the continuation of severe PA following intervention may, in itself, constitute neglect, and will escalate any concerns in this regard in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

# 15. Legal intervention

The college will allow sufficient time for attendance interventions and engagement strategies to improve students’ attendance; however, where engagement strategies to improve attendance have not had the desired effect after one term, the attendance officer will consider:

* Holding a formal meeting with parents and the college’s point of contact in the College Attendance Support Team.
* Working with the LA to put a parenting contract or an education supervision order in place.
* Engaging children’s social care where there are safeguarding concerns.

Where the above measures are not effective, the headteacher will issue a fixed penalty notice in line with the LA’s code of conduct.

Where attendance still does not improve following a fixed penalty notice, the college will work with the LA to take forward attendance prosecution as a last resort.

# 16. Monitoring and analysing absence

The attendance officer will monitor and analyse attendance data weekly to ensure that intervention and support is delivered quickly to address habitual absence at the first signs.

The college will collect data regarding punctuality, authorised and unauthorised absence, for:

* The college cohort as a whole.
* Individual year groups.
* Year groups preparing for exams.
* Individual students.
* Demographic groups, e.g. students from different ethnic groups or economic backgrounds.
* Other groups of students, e.g. students with SEND, LAC and students eligible for FSM.
* Students at risk of PA.

The attendance officer will conduct thorough analysis of the above data on a half-termly, termly and full-year basis to identify patterns and trends. This will include identifying, for each group:

* Patterns in uses of certain codes.
* Particular days of poor attendance.
* Subjects which have low lesson attendance.
* Historic trends of attendance and absence.
* Barriers to attendance.

The attendance officer will provide regular reports to staff across the college to enable them to track the attendance of students and to implement attendance procedures. The attendance officer will also be responsible for monitoring how attendance data changes in response to any interventions implemented to increase attendance in future.

The governing board will regularly review attendance data, including examinations of recent and historic trends, and will support the SLT in setting goals and prioritising areas of focus for attendance support based on this data.

The college will also benchmark its attendance data against local-, regional- and national-level data to identify areas of success and areas for improvement, and will share practice which has been shown to be effective with other colleges.

# 17. Training of staff

The college will recognise that early intervention can prevent poor attendance. As such, staff will receive training in identifying potentially at-risk students as part of their induction and refresher training.

The governing board will ensure that teachers and support staff receive training in line with this policy as part of their induction. Following this initial training, staff will be offered regular and ongoing training as part of their CPD opportunities.

Training will cover at least the following:

* The importance of good attendance
* That absence is almost invariably a result of wider circumstances.
* The legal requirements on colleges, e.g. the keeping of registers
* The college’s strategies and procedures for monitoring and improving attendance.
* The college’s procedures for multi-agency working to provide intensive support for students who need it

The governing board will provide dedicated and enhanced attendance training to the attendance officer and other staff with specific attendance functions in their role – this will include training regarding interpreting and analysing attendance data and supporting students to overcome barriers to attendance.

Staff will receive training to ensure they understand that increased absence from college could indicate a safeguarding concern and know how such concerns should be managed.

# 18. Monitoring and review

Attendance and punctuality will be monitored throughout the year. The college’s attendance target is 80%

This policy will be reviewed every three years by the principal. The next scheduled review date for this policy is 2024.

Any changes made to this policy will be communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

# 