Attendance Policy for South Dartmoor Community College

Mission Statement
Westcountry Schools Trust (WeST) holds a deep-seated belief in education and lifelong learning. Effective collaboration, mutual support and professional challenge will underpin our quest to ensure that all of the pupils and adults we serve are given every opportunity to fulfil their potential and succeed in life.

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WeST Vision, Mission and Values

Westcountry Schools Trust - Our Vision, Mission and Values

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Attendance Policy on a Page

Why is attendance important?
Excellent attendance at school is linked to better academic progress and attainment by ensuring pupils access a broad, balanced and knowledge-rich curriculum. It also ensures that pupils can benefit from the extra-curricular activities on offer at school that promote good social and emotional development. Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child has an appropriate education. For most children in the UK this means full-time attendance at school.

How is attendance recorded?
Schools have a legal duty to take an attendance register twice a day. This is recorded on an electronic system called SIMS. Attendance is recorded each school day for an 'AM' and 'PM' mark. Where a pupil is absent from school the reason for this absence must be established as soon as possible and recorded on the SIMS attendance record.

When should pupils attend school?
Pupils should attend on all school days as set out in the term dates available on the school website. Pupils should arrive by 08.40am. The morning registration period is open for 30 minutes from this time. Pupils who arrive after the registration period closes will be marked as late, with a 'U' code signifying an unauthorised absence.

What should happen if a child cannot attend school?
Parents[1] should inform school as soon as possible that their child is unable to attend by 'phoning 01364 652230. If a child is absent for more than one day parents should continue to update the school of the reason why daily.

Can a child miss school for a medical or dental appointment?
Wherever possible medical and dental appointments should be arranged out of school hours. Where absence to attend an appointment is unavoidable the pupil should miss as little of the school day as possible. School should be informed of the appointment in advance and the pupil should be 'signed-out' at the time of the appointment at main reception using the InVentry system.

Can a child miss school for a family holiday?
The law only allows Headteachers/Head of School to authorise absence in exceptional circumstances. Westcountry Schools Trust (WeST) does not support the authorisation of term-time holidays. If a parent is determined to take their child out of school for a family holiday, then they should use the correct form to inform the Headteacher/Head of School in advance. Should a request for holiday be refused it is likely that a fixed penalty notice will be issued to the parent(s) responsible for the absence of all children absent, in accordance with the national penalty notice framework.

What about children from forces families?
WeST recognises that special consideration should be given to the children of members of our armed forces. Headteachers/Head of School will follow government guidance when considering request from forces families for children to be absent from school.

Who is responsible for attendance?
Every school must have a Senior Attendance Champion, who will take responsibility for attendance. At South Dartmoor Community College this is Ian Squires, SENDCO isquires@southdartmoor.devon.sch.uk
However, attendance is everyone's responsibility, every moment of every day.

[1] The definition of a parent can be found in the Education Act 1996, and this applies to the legislation to which this policy relates. In addition to the child's birth parents, references to parents in this policy include any person who has parental responsibility (which includes the local authority where it has a care order in respect of the child) and any person (for example, a foster carer) who has care of the child. To reflect this, this policy uses 'parent' to refer to both parents and carers

Purpose

Excellent attendance allows children to access the opportunities provided by the school through its curriculum and extra-curricular activities.

This policy sets out the responsibilities of all members of the school community in ensuring excellent attendance. It establishes the legal framework and the responsibilities of all parties to promote, maintain and monitor attendance. It also lays out the school's response to poor attendance.

Linked Documents and Guidance

DfE (2026)	Working Together to Improve School Attendance
DfE (2023)	Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance and examples of effective practice.
MoD (2022)	Term-time absence for service children
DfE (2025)	Keeping Children Safe in Education
DfE (2023)	Working Together to Safeguard Children

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Section 1: The Principles and Legal Framework Around Attendance

We expect the highest level of attendance and punctuality from every pupil. High levels of attendance will provide the opportunity for each pupil to develop their full potential during their time at school. Parents[2], staff, pupils and those in governance must do all in their power to ensure this objective is achieved in line with the legal framework governing attendance and punctuality

The legal framework governing attendance

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states that:

"The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient, full-time education suitable to his/her age, aptitude and ability and to any special educational needs he/she may have either by regular attendance[3] at school or otherwise."

Section 444 further states that:

"The parent of a child of compulsory school age registered at school and failing to attend regularly is guilty of an offence punishable by law."

[2] The definition of a parent can be found in the Education Act 1996, and this applies to the legislation to which this policy relates. In addition to the child's birth parents, references to parents in this policy include any person who has parental responsibility (which includes the local authority where it has a care order in respect of the child) and any person (for example, a foster carer) who has care of the child. To reflect this, this policy uses 'parent' to refer to both parents and carers

[3] Whilst there is no legal definition of 'regular attendance' this was addressed in the Supreme Court judgement around term-time holidays in the case of Isle of Wight v. Platt

An offence is not committed if it can be demonstrated that:

- The pupil was absent with leave (authorised absence)
- The pupil was ill or prevented from attending by unavoidable cause
- The absence occurred on a day set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil/parent belongs
- The absence meets the criteria set for children of Traveller groups such as Gypsy/Roma families

Failure to comply may lead to prosecution in the Magistrates Court where on conviction each parent would be liable to a fine up to £2500 and/or 3 months' imprisonment.

The Act also places a legal obligation on:

- The Local Authority (LA) to provide school places and enforce school attendance.
- Schools to register attendance and notify the LA of a child's absence from school without authorisation of 10 or more days[4].
- Those in governance to make sure that school registers are kept; one for attendance and one for admissions.

Section 2: Roles and Responsibilities

Trustees of Westcountry Schools Trust (WeST) will:

- Review and agree the WeST template Attendance Policy regularly following advice from the WeST Director of Safeguarding.
- Through the Education Standards Committee hold executive and school leaders to account for attendance across schools in WeST.

WeST Community Councils (WCCs) will:

- Monitor the implementation of the schools' attendance policies and procedures
- Monitor school-level attendance against WeST targets
- Monitor local school attendance data and procedures for equal opportunity issues

The WeST Director of Safeguarding (DoS) will:

- Review and revise the template WeST Attendance Policy regularly (in accordance with the review schedule) and ensure that local adaptations are in place across all schools in the trust
- Monitor the attendance at each school to identify any patterns in the attendance of groups of pupils which may require targeted intervention
- Work with staff in schools to implements targeted interventions to improve attendance
- Report on attendance data to the WeST Education Standards Committee

The Headteacher/Head of School will:

- Set a school attendance target as directed by the WeST Executive Leadership Team
- Monitor progress of attendance of all pupils
- Report on attendance data to their WeST Community Council

The Senior Attendance Champion will:

- Oversee attendance arrangements across the school
- Work with school staff to ensure the efficient running of the attendance system
- Make periodic checks of the registers to monitor pupil absence
- Make periodic checks on absence notes and the reasons for absence
- Deal with issues of inadequate registering of pupils and recording of attendance procedures
- Arrange appropriate training for staff
- Determine whether to authorise any proposed absences requested on the school's official form, or absences which have taken place for which no request was made

[4] **NB -** this notification to the LA around 10 days of absence is different to the threshold for a Fixed Penalty Notice, which is 10 sessions of absence (i.e. 5 days)

- 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 and train staff accordingly
- Oversee school liaison with the WeST Education Welfare Officer (EWO) over persistent and severe absentees after school action has taken place (i.e. at stage 4 of the WeST attendance support process).
- Liaise with the Local Authority (LA) and police when they wish to exercise their powers to enforce truants to return to school.
- Liaise with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) to ensure that the termly safeguarding reports for those in governance are completed correctly with regards to attendance-related data.

In secondary schools Heads of Year will:

- Ensure that all suspected truancy is followed up and dealt with.
- Contact parents over pupil absences where appropriate.
- Liaise with the Attendance Officer to review patterns of attendance/punctuality and agree appropriate intervention strategies.
- Make pupils aware of their attendance at regular intervals.
- Support targeted pupils.
- Ensure that students chronologies are completed and all actions are recorded.
- Complete Return to School meetings with students.

They may also carry out home visits to check on the welfare of a pupil.

Tutors/Class Teachers will:

- Ensure that pupils are registered accurately.
- Inform the pastoral team of any signs of suspected truancy.
- Inform the pastoral team of any possible underlying problems which might account for absences and lateness.

In schools using Lesson Monitor for lesson-by-lesson registration teaching staff will:

- Inform the appropriate member of staff of the names of pupils who are absent without notification.
- Responsible for the accurate official registration of pupils at the beginning of each lesson, using SIMS Lesson Monitor.
- Welcome any pupil with long term absence back into the classroom without question ensuring that they can be supported to catch up missed work.

The Attendance Officer will:

- Prepare reports as required for the Headteacher/Head of School and others.
- Contact parents on the first day of absence.
- Support targeted pupils.
- Use 'broken weeks' analysis to consider whether to advise targeted intervention where there are attendance concerns, especially early in the academic year when % attendance may be skewed by the low number of school sessions.
- Use the WeST attendance support process to inform parents where a pupil's absence falls below the acceptable level.
- Notify Heads of Year of any patterns of absence.
- Liaise with the WeST Education Welfare Officer (EWO) over persistent/severe absentees after school action has taken place (i.e. at stage 4 of the WeST attendance support process).
- Make periodic checks on absence notes and the reasons for absence.
- Update the WEST Attendance Tracker.

The Attendance Administrator will:

- Enter attendance/absence data into SIMS, using Lesson Monitor.
- Follow up cases of unaccounted for absence or unacceptable notes.
- Make regular checks on absence notes.

- Ensure that all pupil absences are noted and that communication (absence notes/ emails/ calls) is received from parents.
- Make regular checks on the efficiency of the registering.
- Contact parents on the first day of absence.
- Prepare attendance records for tutors.
- Notify Heads of Year of any patterns of absence.
- Monitor missing marks and notify the Assistant Head teacher, the teacher responsible for the register and their line manager weekly.
- Provide up-to-date chronologies as and when required.
- Producing and recording all escalation completed as per the WeST escalation system.

The SENDCO will:

- Support pupils on the SEND register who have regular patterns of non-attendance.
- Be involved in any re-integration programme, where deemed necessary.
- Advise on or support with first day of absence calling and home visits for pupils with SEND.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will:

- Ensure that the school's Child Protection Online Monitoring System (CPOMS) is set-up with the sub-categories for attendance as set out in the latest WeST guidance on the use of CPOMS.
- Ensure that the relevant WeST Education Welfare Officer (EWO) has access to CPOMS to both read and record on CPOMS profiles.
- Ensure that the termly WeST safeguarding reports for governance, which include data on attendance, reduced time-tables, alternative provision and elective home education are completed and returned to the WeST DoS on time.
- Work closely with attendance team members to ensure that home visits are prioritised for vulnerable pupils, e.g. those looked after by the local authority or subject to a s17 child in need or s47 child protection plan.
- Ensure that the correct procedures, including the Local Authority safeguarding checks, are followed and recorded on CPOMS where parents request to electively home educate their child.

The WeST Education Welfare Officer (EWO) will:

- Liaise with the school staff regarding concerns over pupil absence.
- Support the school in improving the attendance of its pupils.
- Work with parents to ensure good school attendance (typically when the Stage 4 threshold has been met).
- Attend timetabled meetings with school staff to deal with attendance/punctuality and welfare issues.
- Advise the school as to its legal obligations and complete appropriate paperwork for legal proceedings.

They may also carry out home visits to check on the welfare of a pupil, although this is not a core part of their regular duties.

Pupils are required to:

- Attend all sessions in the school year unless they are ill or have an authorised absence ('Attending regularly' means registering before the attendance register is closed for the session)
- Attend all lessons promptly, unless they have a valid reason for not attending a particular lesson agreed by the school.
- Adhere to the school's procedures for signing-in and signing-out of school if arriving or leaving at a time other than the normal start and end of the school day.

Parents are required to:

- Be responsible for ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually in accordance with their legal obligations
- Make any request for leave of absence on the school's official leave of absence form (see appendix 2).
- Telephone school on the first day of absence and any subsequent days.
- Provide a reason to explain any absence.

- Plan holidays outside of term time.
- Attend any meetings organised by the school and/or EWO to create an action plan to improve attendance.

Section 3: Expectations and processes of managing attendance and following-up on unexplained absence.

Expected Attendance

The law requires schools to be open to pupils for 190 days each year[5]. Each day a legal register is taken for the 'AM' and 'PM' session. In addition, registers are taken for lesson attendance. All registers are recorded electronically on a database called SIMS. This information constitutes the legal attendance register for the school as such is shared with the LA and government for their reporting and monitoring purposes. The times of the daily registration are:

- Morning session, 'AM Registration': from 8:40 to 9:10.
- Afternoon session, 'PM Registration': from 12:30 to 13:00.

Attendance registers will be taken at the same time for all registered pupils in accordance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 and the statutory guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2026). Separate registration arrangements will not normally be used for individual pupils except where specifically permitted in law.

Overall attendance is calculated on the legal requirement for pupils to attend 190 school days per year. As each day consists of two sessions ('AM' and 'PM') there are a total of 380 possible sessions in a school year. Therefore, if a pupil is ill for three days in a year, their attendance would be 98.4% because 3 days is 6 missed registration sessions and (374/380) x 100 = 98.4% attendance.

The Department for Education defines any pupil with below 90% attendance as Persistently Absent, and any pupil with attendance below 50% as Severely Absent.

Monitoring

Parents may request an up-to-date attendance report at any time during the school year. Please contact the Attendance Administrator to request this. Parents can also check their child's attendance on the Class Charts App.

The school will have regular checks to monitor attendance, including;

- Daily checks carried out by the attendance administrator of the SIMS registers. Parents of pupils coded N (unauthorised absence – reason for absence not yet provided) for that day may expect a phone call from *the attendance administrator in addition to the automated system to* ask for an explanation for their child's absence.
- Each week the attendance officer will analyse data patterns of attendance across the school by pupil groups to highlight areas for improvement using the WeST attendance tracker. With due consideration for individual circumstances, overseen by the Senior Attendance Champion, the following actions may be taken based on this weekly analysis:

[5] Under so called Academy freedoms schools in WeST may choose to assign one or more of these days for additional staff training (i.e. non-pupil INSET days)

Stage	Who is Responsible?	% Attendance	Total Number of Sessions Absent	Number of UNAUTHORISED Sessions Absent	Action
0	School	More than 97%	Less than 10	None	School continues to monitor and recognise good attendance.
1	School	96%	10 sessions	4 sessions	**CONVERSATION** to explore reasons, remind parent their child is now only just at expected attendance levels, and try to identify barriers around attendance, OR explain concerns around unauthorised absence.
2	School	95%	15 sessions	8 sessions	**YELLOW LETTER**, stating that since the conversation child has now fallen below expected level of attendance, OR unauthorised absences are too high.
3	School	92%	30 sessions	10 sessions	**AMBER LETTER** inviting parent to a **Supportive Attendance Meeting (SAM).** Attendance Action Plan agreed and confirmed in writing, including a review period. This is followed by a review meeting (at which WeST EWO referral will be explained if there has been no further improvement.)
4	School (handing over to WeST EWO)	90%	40 Sessions Or further unauthorised absences after SAM	More than 10 sessions	**RED LETTER - referral to WeST EWO.** EWO will contact parent and arrange either a **review meeting** (authorised absences) or a **formal meeting** (unauthorised absences).

- In line with DfE school census guidance at the end of each academic year, registers are reset, and attendance is started again for the next academic year. However, attendance concerns will be considered on a rolling basis.
- Attendance data will be benchmarked against local authority, regional and national attendance data, together with attendance information from comparable schools where available. This benchmarking will be used to identify priorities for attendance improvement and evaluate the effectiveness of attendance strategies.
- Attendance patterns of key vulnerable groups will be routinely analysed, including pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), pupils with a social worker, looked after and previously looked after children, disadvantaged pupils, pupils eligible for free school meals and young carers.

WeST has access to all school attendance registers daily. School attendance records, held on its Management Information System (MIS), are also shared with the Department for Education (DfE) via the WONDE platform. The school also provides attendance data to the LA and DfE at regular intervals during the academic year as part of statutory school accountability processes.

Truancy

A pupil is deemed to be truanting when they are not where they are expected to be, as shown by their timetable, and does not have permission to be elsewhere.

- If pupils truant from lessons, or leave the school site, this will be recorded on the appropriate school information systems
- Parents are informed.
- Truancy will be dealt with in line with the school's Behaviour Policy.

Punctuality

It is important to make the distinction between a late that occurs during the official registration period (marked as 'L') and a late that occurs after the official registration period (marked as 'U' and which constitutes an unauthorised absence). The registration period covers the time between 08:40 and 09:10 during the morning session.

The Attendance Administrator will ensure the appropriate late code is recorded on SIMS:

- ‘L’ where a pupil arrives late but during the morning registration period (08:40 and 09:10). This does not affect the pupil’s overall attendance figure.
- ‘U’ where a pupil arrives later after the morning registration period has closed (i.e. after 09:10)[6]. This will affect the pupil’s overall attendance figure.

Pupils who become persistently absent through lateness will have parent(s) contacted by the Head of Year and/or Assistant HoY.

Pupils that arrive late for morning registration (08:40-09:10) should go to their welcome morning line up or tutor group and will be coded as the appropriate late code by the pastoral team. Pupils who arrive late after the morning registration period (i.e. after 9:10) should sign-in at Reception and will be marked as ‘U’.

Signing-out

There must always be an accurate record of all pupils on-site. Pupils must sign-out if they are leaving the school site.

Pupils that arrive late for morning registration (08:40-09:10) should go to their welcome morning line up or tutor group and will be coded as the appropriate late code by the pastoral team. Pupils who arrive late after the morning registration period (i.e. after 9:10) should sign-in at Reception and will be marked as ‘U’.

Long-term Medical Absence

When a pupil is absent because of long-term illness, or an under-lying health condition an Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) may be written alongside the parent and other appropriate stakeholders. This should provide a structure for the pupil to be re-integrated back into the classroom. An IHCP should only be completed once diagnosis is confirmed and the prognosis given by the medical team supporting the pupil.

School may write to parents to request medical evidence to support accurate recording of attendance/absence and to facilitate planning to support a pupil’s access to schooling.

Section 4: Absence, persistent absence, severe absence and support for pupils and parents

Absence

WeST understands that pupils may be genuinely absent for obvious reasons, including: poor health or illness; bereavement; and other exceptional circumstances. Parents are required to inform the school as soon as possible of their child’s absence. They must also give a reason for the absence. Pupils missing registration will be initially coded ‘N’ (No reason given), until an explanation has been given from the parent. It can then be changed to the appropriate code, for example ‘I’ (Illness). ‘N’ marks should be changed to ‘O’ (absent without authorisation) after 5 days if no reason has been identified for the absence. If no reason is received by the end of the school day the absence will be recorded as ‘O’ unauthorised, which may be amended later, if a reason for the absence is provided.

Schools will not routinely request medical evidence to support illness absence and do not operate blanket requirements for such evidence. In most cases a parent's explanation that their child is too ill to attend school will be accepted. However, where there is genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of illness absence, or where medical evidence will assist the school in understanding a pupil's health needs and identifying appropriate support, the school may request reasonable evidence. The form of evidence requested will be proportionate and flexible, taking account of the individual circumstances of the pupil and family

[6] There may be occasions where the ‘C’ code (other authorised circumstances) is used, e.g. if lateness is known to be the result of a pupil acting as a young carer. Such cases needed to be carefully considered and made with the approval of the Senior Attendance Champion. A record of the decision-making should be on CPOMS, for external scrutiny.

Leave of Absence
The Headteacher/Head of School can only grant leave of absence in very exceptional cases. The Headteacher/Head of School will make decisions with due regard for the individual circumstances and attendance profile of the pupil concerned.

Should families wish to apply for leave of absence, a request form (see Appendix 2) can be collected from the Attendance Officer at least two weeks prior to the date leave is required. The form should be returned to the Attendance Officer, who will consult with the Head of Year and the Headteacher/Head of School. Parents will be advised of the outcome. Should parents wish to appeal this decision, this should be addressed in writing to the Headteacher/Head of School as part of the WeST complaints process.

Support for pupils not maintaining expected levels of attendance
Pupils will face a graduated level of support to meet their need for improving attendance. The most effective support is when clear lines of communication are established between all parties involved. The strategies that may be employed will include (but are not limited to the following). In each case due consideration will be given to the individual circumstances of the pupil.

96 % attendance / 10 sessions of authorised absence / 4 sessions of unauthorised absence
A conversation (stage 1) will take place to explore the reasons for absence, remind the parent of attendance expectations and try to identify any barriers around attendance.

95% Attendance / 15 sessions of authorised absence / 8 sessions of unauthorised absence
A yellow (stage 2) attendance concern letter will be sent home stating that the pupil's attendance has fallen below expected levels.

92% attendance / 30 sessions of authorised absence / 10 sessions of unauthorised absence
An amber attendance concern letter (stage 3) will be sent home inviting the parent to a Supportive Attendance Meeting (SAM).

90% attendance / 40 sessions of authorised absence / more than 10 sessions of unauthorised absence
A red referral to WeST EWO letter (stage 4) will be sent home. The EWO will then make contact about the next step, e.g. a review meeting or a formal absence meeting.

Other Strategies that may be used
- Requests for additional medical evidence.
- Parents may be invited to attend an Early Help Assessment Tool (EHAT) meeting, where barriers to attendance can be discussed and solutions offered.
- Where social, emotional or mental health (SEMH) needs or other medical needs are identified, referral to the appropriate agency may be supported. For example, counselling, CAMHS or other pupil services.
- Reduced timetables may only be offered pupils with a medical or SEMH need. They should only be used for the shortest time possible to allow a successful re-integration and must not be used as response to poor behaviour.[7]
- WeST Education Welfare Officers (EWO) may contact families directly. They may also carry out home visits.
- The DSL and Senior Attendance Champion (Assistant Head teacher) may carry out a home visit to help support pupils and families.

Section 5: Parental Guidance for holiday requests

WeST believes that pupils benefit from full-time attendance at school so that they can access a broad, balanced and knowledge-rich curriculum that promotes academic progress and attainment. Excellent attendance also ensures that pupils can benefit from the extra-curricular activities on offer at school that promote good social and

[7] See DfE Guidance (September 2022): Behaviour in Schools

emotional development. As such, WeST does not encourage its Headteachers/Head of School to authorise requests for term-time holidays. Whilst WeST recognises that Headteachers/Head of School may legally authorise such request in exceptional circumstances it is highly unlikely that this will be the case. This stance is in line with DfE guidance[8], para 38.

"The DfE does not consider a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance."

- From September 2013, the Government has legislated that no holidays will be authorised in term time[9]
- If parents take their children on holiday during term time the Headteacher/Head of School will request that the Local Authority issue a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN)
- The school will act according to DfE and LA advice should there be any changes in legislation

What parents should consider

WeST recognises that it is often expensive to take a holiday during school breaks and that is why some parents may ask for term time leave for their children; this is not considered to be 'exceptional circumstances.' It is important that parents carefully consider the implications of taking their child out of school during term time. Research suggests that children who are taken out of school may never catch up on the work they have missed. This may affect test results and can be particularly harmful if the child is studying for final year examinations. Children who struggle with English or Mathematics may also find it even harder to cope when they return to school, while children of all ages may find it difficult to renew friendships with their classmates.

Any absence from school may lead to a child experiencing problems, such as difficulties securing basic skills of reading, writing and maths which are fundamental to progress through out school. However, absence at certain times of year can be particularly problematic, e.g.

- Closeness to exams or tests
- During GCSEs, A-levels and other examination courses
- During the first year at a new school
- At the beginning of a new school term

If the school refuses a request for term time leave and the child is still taken out of school, this will be recorded as unauthorised absence and may lead to a £160 (£80 is paid within 21 days) fine per parent responsible for the absence, for each child.

The Law

The law does not say that parents have an automatic right to take their child out of school for holidays during term time. However, in *exceptional circumstances* the Headteacher/Head of School may authorise, in advance, requests for periods of leave. The request for leave must come from a parent with whom the child normally resides.

If a child then stays away from school for more than the authorised period, this must be recorded as unauthorised absence and could be quoted in a prosecution for poor attendance. If the child is away from school for a total of 4 weeks or more, the school may have to take the child off roll unless there is a good reason for the continued absence, such as illness[10]. In these circumstances it is up to the parent to inform the school, as once removed from roll there is no guarantee that the child will regain a place at the school.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 came into force on 1 September 2013. The amendments make it clear that Headteachers/Head of School may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Headteachers/Head of School should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted.

[8] DfE (2023): Working Together to Improve School Attendance
[9] This was tested in the Isle of Wight v. Platt case, upon which the Supreme Court made a judgement
[10] DfE9 (2016) Children Missing in Education

Holiday prices, and the fact that the parents have booked a holiday before checking with the school, are not exceptional circumstances.

Other absence from school will be authorised if it is for the following reasons:

- Genuine illness
- Unavoidable medical / dental appointments
  (but these should be arranged out of school hours if possible)
- Days of religious observance
- Exceptional circumstances, such as bereavement
- Seeing a parent who is on leave from the armed forces[11]
- External examinations
- When Traveller children go on the road with their parents, where the school is informed beforehand

Other absence from school will not be authorised, for example:

- For any type of shopping
- Looking after siblings or parents
- Minding the house
- Birthdays
- Resting after a late night
- Relatives visiting or visiting relatives
- Because holidays are cheaper in term time
- More than one day for a family wedding

Fixed Penalty Notices

The school will issue and administer penalty notices according to Local Authority procedures which are governed by the national framework for penalty notices.

The penalty is £80, for each parent responsible for the absence per child, if paid within 21 days or £160 if paid within 28 days. Failure to pay may result in prosecution where on conviction parents would be liable to a fine of up to £2500.

- Penalty notices may be issued where it is determined that to do so would be an effective and appropriate addition to ongoing casework with a pupil and their parent. The Headteacher/Head of School will be informed if this action is taken.
- Where feasible, parents should be warned of the possibility of a penalty notice being issued and invited to make representations to the school.

Section 6: Strategies for promoting school attendance

WeST recognises that positively promoting excellent attendance (above 97%) will have the biggest impact on a pupil's attainment and wellbeing. Intrinsic motivators, such as a developing a pupil's own desire and ambition to attend school regularly and do well, are always preferably to extrinsic motivators such as school rewards systems. However, WeST recognises that in some circumstances rewards and incentives can play a role in promoting good school attendance by recognising pupil achievement, especially where attendance improves through a pupil's actions to overcome barriers to attendance. It is important to ensure that any such rewards and incentives are applied fairly and that they do not discriminate against either groups or individual pupils.

[11] Due consideration should be given to the guidance, MOD advice to headteachers: term-time absence for service children

Schools in WeST will pay careful consideration to the Equality Act 2010[12] to ensure that individuals with protected characteristics are not discriminated against. As such, WeST does not agree with rewarding pupils for 100% attendance as this may discriminate against pupils, e.g. those with under-lying health conditions for whom 100% attendance is unachievable.

Rewards that may be used at our school are:

- Praise Shop.
- Cinema trips.
- Pizza parties.
- Attendance certificates.
- Shopping vouchers.
- Weekly tutor challenge with prizes.
- Celebration assemblies.
- Lunch passes.
- Attendance loyalty cards
- Attendance cups.
- Attendance postcards

Section 7: Elective Home Education

Parents have a legal right to request elective home education (EHE) for their child, in line with their statutory duty under the Education Act 1996 to ensure their child receives a full time, efficient education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude, and any special educational needs. However, WeST strongly believes that the majority of pupils are best served by receiving their education in school, where they benefit from structured learning, social development safeguarding oversight. Where parents are considering EHE, they are encouraged to discuss this with school staff at the earliest opportunity to explore all options and implications. Should a parent formally request to de-register their child the school will initiate the appropriate Local Authority safeguarding checks and notify the WeST EWO. The EWO will then contact the parent to ensure they fully understand their responsibilities associated with EHE, and to offer support where appropriate.

Section 8: Flexi-schooling

Flexi-schooling is a legal option for parents to fulfil their statutory obligation to provide a full-time and efficient education for their child. However, schools are not legally required to offer flexi-schooling arrangements, and the decision to do so lies solely with the Headteacher/Head of School. This decision is made on a case-by-case basis, considering the child's best interests. In line with its general principles, WeST believes that the vast majority of children benefit most from a full-time school education. Parents should be aware that there is no right of appeal against the Headteacher's/Head of School's decision on flexi-schooling requests. If dissatisfied with the outcome, parents are advised to follow the WeST complaints procedure.

Version	Summary of Changes
Jan 2023	New policy for use across WeST schools
Sept 2023	Updated in line with the WeST attendance escalation process New template letters added in line with the WeST attendance escalation process
June 2024	Changes to WeST attendance support processes Changes in lines with the new statutory guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance
July 2025	Addition of Section 7: Elective Home Education and Section 8: Flexi-schooling
Sept 2026	Changes to WeST Vision, Mission and Values. Additional information on attendance processes in EYFS. Updated in line with Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2026).

[12] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

Appendix 1 – Template letters for the WeST Attendance Support Process

Stage 2 - YELLOW ATTENDANCE LETTER: 8 sessions unauthorised absence

«addressee»
«address »

Date

Dear «salutation»

«forename» «surname» «reg»
Date of birth: «date_of_birth»

Percentage attendance: «percentage_attendance»% This equates to <<number of sessions>> missed, there are two sessions per school day.

At name of School, we recognise the importance of good attendance and punctuality, and the positive impact this has on personal development and academic progress.

«forename»'s tutor/teacher/head of year has previously contacted you to discuss your child's attendance and how we can support «forename» in school. Unfortunately, «forename» has now missed «number sessions unauthorised» sessions due to unauthorised absence.

Unauthorised absences are recorded when either no reason for the absence is given, or the reasons given are not authorised by the school. A pupil may also incur unauthorised absence for a whole session if they are late to school after the registers have closed, or a request for leave of absence is not authorised or not requested by you prior to the absence.

«forename»'s tutor/teacher/head of year will continue to work with you to try and resolve any challenges that they are facing. Working together is often the most effective way of making positive changes leading to improved engagement, enjoyment and ultimately attendance at school.

Please find enclosed/attached a copy of your child's attendance record for this academic school year for your reference.

Yours sincerely,

Name of staff
Senior Attendance Champion

Stage 3 - AMBER LETTER: 30 sessions authorised absence / 92% attendance

«addressee»
«address_block»

Date

Dear «salutation»

«forename» «surname» «reg»
Date of birth: «date_of_birth»

Percentage attendance: «percentage_attendance»% This equates to <<number of sessions>> missed, there are two sessions per school day.

Following our previous communications about «forename»'s absence, their attendance has fallen below the expected level. This is impacting on their experience and progress at school.

Name of colleague, has spoken to you already to arrange a meeting to discuss any challenges that your child is facing.

This meeting will take place time, date and location of meeting.

At this meeting we will agree an Attendance Action Plan. This will set out ways we have agreed we can work together to help «forename» improve their attendance.

Further Absences
Following this meeting further absences may only be authorised, if we are satisfied that the reasons for the absence were completely unavoidable. We will discuss this at the meeting. If you can provide us with additional information this will help us code further absence appropriately. For example, you could provide us with an appointment card from a medical practitioner or a copy of your child's prescription.

If you believe that your child has an ongoing medical condition which is impacting their ability to attend school fully, please tell us about this at the meeting. We will consider developing or amending an Individual Health Care Plan with you. We will also try and engage any appropriate health care professionals, to support your child with their education, if not already in place.

If there are other challenges which impact on «forename»'s ability to attend school regularly, then it may be possible to access some additional support under Early Help. If you would like us to explore this with you then we can discuss this at the meeting. Further information about Early Help is available at: insert URL for appropriate LA Early Help offer.

Yours sincerely,

Name of Staff
Senior Attendance Champion

Stage 3 - AMBER LETTER: 10 sessions of unauthorised absence

«addressee»
«address_block»

Date

Dear «salutation»

«forename» «surname» «reg»
Date of birth: «date_of_birth»

Percentage attendance: «percentage_attendance»% This equates to <<number of sessions>> missed, there are two sessions per school day.

Following our previous communications «forename» has had further sessions of unauthorised absence. They have now missed «number sessions unauthorised» sessions due to unauthorised absence. This absence is impacting on their experience and progress at school.

Name of colleague, has spoken to you already to arrange a meeting to discuss any challenges that your child is facing.

This meeting will take place time, date and location of meeting.

At this meeting we will agree an Attendance Action Plan. This will set out ways we have agreed we can work together to help «forename» improve their attendance.

I must advise you that under section 444(1) and section 444(1A) of the Education Act 1996 it is an offence by the parents or carer if their child, who is a registered pupil at a school, fails to attend regularly. If your «forename»'s attendance does not improve, then we will refer this to the Westcountry Schools Trust Education Welfare Officer (WeST EWO). This could lead to a penalty notice (fine) being issued or other legal proceedings.

Further Absences
Following this meeting further absences may only be authorised, if we are satisfied that the reasons for the absence were completely unavoidable. If you can provide us with additional information this will help us code further absence appropriately. For example, you could provide us with an appointment card from a medical practitioner or a copy of your child's prescription.

If you believe that your child has an ongoing medical condition which is impacting their ability to attend school fully, please tell us about this at the meeting. We will also try and engage any appropriate health care professionals, to support your child with their education, if not already in place.

If there are other challenges which impact on «forename»'s ability to attend school regularly, then it may be possible to access some additional support under Early Help. If you would like us to explore this with you then we can discuss this at the meeting. Further

information about Early Help is available at: insert URL for appropriate LA Early Help offer.

Yours sincerely,

Name of Staff
Senior Attendance Champion

Stage 4 - RED LETTER: Referral to WeST EWO due to 40 sessions of authorised absence / 90% attendance / unauthorised absence following a SAM / more than 10 sessions of unauthorised absence

«addressee»
«address_block»

Date

Dear «salutation»,
«forename» «surname» «reg»
Date of birth: «date_of_birth»

Percentage attendance: «percentage_attendance»% This equates to <<number of sessions>> missed, there are two sessions per school day.

Following our meeting on insert date regarding our concerns about «forename»'s attendance where we set out an agreed attendance action plan there has been no significant and lasting improvement.

«forename» is now considered to be in / or at risk of falling into the category of a Persistent Absentee, as defined by the Department of Education. This means your child has missed 10% or more of the days they should have attended school.

This matter has now been referred to name of EWO, Westcountry School's Trust Education Welfare Officer (WeST EWO), who will monitor your child's attendance alongside us and will be looking to support you and your child to improve their attendance. Name of EWO will contact you directly to discuss this matter further.

I must advise you that under section 444(1) and section 444(1A) of the Education Act 1996 it is an offence by the parents or carer if their child, who is a registered pupil at a school, fails to attend regularly. If your «forename»'s attendance does not improve this could lead to a penalty notice (fine) being issued or other legal proceedings.

If you feel that there are genuine reasons for «forename»'s continued absence or you have significant medical evidence that you would like us to consider then you should provide this immediately.

Please find attached/enclosed a copy of your child's attendance record for your reference.

Yours sincerely,

Name of staff

Senior Attendance Champion

Appendix 2: Absence request form

S2 A request by a parent, that a future absence/period of absence be authorised by a school/college/academy

Schools are only allowed by law, to authorise non-medical absences if requested in advance by a parent with whom the pupil normally resides. A school can only authorise such a request if they are satisfied that there are "exceptional circumstances" which apply. However, even if there are exceptional circumstances, schools can still consider any other relevant factors such as previous attendance rates; the ability of the pupil to catch-up on missed work; the wider impact of missing the specified period of time.

Devon County Council's advice is that schools must be extremely cautious about approving such requests if the pupil's education is likely to be significantly impacted upon.

Parents should ensure that they know whether the absence will be authorised or not before they go away as an unauthorised absence will likely result in a penalty notice or court summons being issued to each parent for each pupil affected. It is therefore recommended that this completed form is sent into the school **at least three school weeks** before the intended absence.

To be completed by a parent with whom the child(ren) lives.

Child's name: …… → Class/Year Group: ……

Child's name: …… → Class/Year Group: ……

Full name(s) of all parents going away with the child(ren) listed above:

Parent 1: ……

Parent 2: ……

Address: ……

Period Absent: **From** …… **To** ……

Number of school days that will be missed: ……

Please explain the reason for the absence (consider that the school will use this to determine whether the "exceptional circumstances" criteria is met.

You are asked to sign this request to confirm that the information provided above is correct, and that you have read the warning contained in the Additional Information overleaf.

Name of parent completing this form: …… Signed: ……

Date: ……

For school use. To be completed by a member of staff so authorised

Date form received in school: .....

Pupils current attendance rate: → → → → ... %

Number of unauthorised absences in last 6 months: → ...

☐ → Absence authorised – the school authorises the above absence as requested, satisfied → that exceptional circumstances apply to this specific request.

☐ → Absence unauthorised – the school is unable to authorise the absences specified overleaf. →

If request is unauthorised, the main reason(s) are: (please tick all/any that apply)

☐ → Circumstances not deemed to be exceptional → ☐ Current attendance rate is low

☐ → The period covered by this request (length) → → ☐ Number of unauthorised absences is high

☐ → The time of the school year → ☐ Other (please specify)

.....

.....

.....

Date parent notified of school decision: .....

Signed (member of staff making determination): ..... Designation: .....

If this request is unauthorised by the school, a penalty notice may be issued by Devon County Council. A penalty notice offers a parent the opportunity of dealing with a potential offence without going to court, by paying a penalty. If parents can't afford to pay, or for any other reason do not take the offer of paying the notice within a set time, then the case will proceed to a magistrates court. The provision of penalty notices is set by Regulations and the amount of the penalty, timeframe for payment or payment method are not able to be varied by Devon County Council.

Parents should note that penalty notices are issued per parent per child. In addition to natural parents any person with parental responsibility, any person considered to have day to day care and control of a young person is deemed to be a parent in matters relating to education and school non-attendance (s576 Education Act 1996)

Parents should also note that as of 19th August 2024, only two penalty notices will be issued in a three-year period. A third offence may result in a summons to Magistrates Court which may result in a fine up to £2,500 and/or a term of imprisonment for up to 3 months.

PRIVACY NOTICE:

The information provided on this form will be used for purposes relating to School Attendance Legal Proceedings and may be shared with relevant services and organisations. It will not be processed or shared for any unrelated purpose. For further information please see our full privacy notice at https://www.devon.gov.uk/privacy/privacy-notices/privacy-notice-for-school-attendance-legal-proceedings/

Revised August 2026