**Attendance Strategy**

**Guiding Principles**

This strategy also supports Unity Schools Partnership commitment to unlock the potential of all children, remove the barriers that limit aspiration and ensure that all our children succeed. We believe it is our role to make remarkable things happen and therefore as a family of schools, through our geographical hubs of like-minded schools and a vision of excellence that is shared by all, schools smash through barriers to achieve more than others think possible.

* The vision of Unity Schools Partnership is to achieve the highest standards of education in its primary, secondary and special schools.
* It is our intention that all trust schools, and the trust as a whole, be recognised locally and nationally for the exceptional quality of its educational provision
* We are a family of interdependent schools with a shared ambition to transform lives
* We are committed to the development of a very high-quality, and evidence-informed, model of how excellence is achieved
* Our work is fostered by geographical hubs of schools in close proximity that understand their specific communities.

**The National Context**

In 2012 Charlie Taylor, the then Government Expert Advisor on Behaviour, produced a report ‘Improving attendance at school’ which highlighted the link between poor attendance at school and lower academic achievement. Although attendance improved steadily from 2006-2014, it has been declining over the past years with a very significant increase in absence during and after Covid. Current levels of attendance remain below pre-pandemic levels (February 2022 90.3%). The evidence continues to show that poor levels of attendance in the primary phase tend to escalate in the secondary phase and the likelihood of becoming NEET greater. Furthermore, in addition to disaffection there are well known links between non-attendance, street crime and anti-social behaviour. The government sees reducing absence from school as a priority and has made attendance a key aim of the recent publication in May 2022 – “School attendance Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities which set out an ambition to increase attendance and also set out some clear expectations for all schools and MATs.” In June the Children’s Commissioner published a report – the Voices of the England’s Missing Children. The report found that “in Autumn 2021, the number of children persistently absent more than doubled compared to 2018/19, almost 1 in 4 children were persistently absent from school compared to around 1 in 9 in 2018/19”.

**Local Context**

Attendance at our schools has mirrored the national picture. The post pandemic Trust wide attendance in the 2021-2022 academic year is 91.6% to date which is above the current national level. It remains significantly below our target of 96.5%. USP does not accept this reduced position and is working to raise the level of attendance across all our schools. We see similar patterns to the national across the phases and including our Special schools. We are working hard to share best practice from our schools and work in partnership with schools, academies, health, the voluntary sector and council services. This current strategy to take into account recent changes both at a national and local level. This new strategy covers the coming years 2022-2025 and will allow us to continue to make improvements in attendance. This strategy is founded on an ethos of partnership working with our schools, academies, partners and stakeholders. It builds on our existing good practice and incorporates government guidance and legislation.

**Strategy**

1. **USP Central Team**

USP has a duty to ensure that all our schools fulfil their legal responsibility in respect of their children’s education. This is usually through attendance at school. Our Central Attendance Team will:

* + Monitor each school’s attendance policy, strategy, data and actions to support high levels of attendance
* Ensure that schools fulfil their legal duty to keep accurate registers and liaise with the Local Authority in respect of Fixed Penalty Notices and decisions by parents to Electively Home Educate, Transition arrangements and also the In Year Fair Access Panel
* Provide half termly analysis of the Trust’s attendance data by phase
* Ensure that all Attendance Leads in the Trust are aware of any changes to legislation and guidance, and that the relevant staff have received the correct level of training

1. **Role of schools and academies**

Schools have a statutory duty under section 175 of the Education Act 2002 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This can only be fulfilled through effective registration systems and active, whole school monitoring of pupil absence, in order to support and promote regular school attendance. Our schools will:

• Report on attendance to the LGB at least termly

* Publish an attendance policy approved by its Local Governing Body on its website and which will be reviewed annually
* Make clear its approach to attendance to new parents/carers and its expectations of parents/carers in all transition and induction activities including a clear statement about term time holidays and the school’s staged response to attendance issues, and first day calling strategy.
* Provide training on the correct use of codes to record attendance and absence
* Ensure that all staff have clear training on the importance of promoting attendance and supporting an inclusive approach to attendance, including its role in the school’s safeguarding strategy, and their role as tutor, support staff, leadership team in supporting attendance
* Will ensure that the focus on supporting “severely absent” students back into school is robust and rigorous and will include daily contact calls, weekly home visits and deployment of resources and welfare officers (anxiety, SEMH, personal loss etc.) to support the child in their return to school.
* Will have a strategy that rewards the positive attendance of all children.
* Will report on attendance at least once a year to parents/carers
* Will close their registers within 30 minutes of the beginning of the school day
* Maintain accurate tracking of the attendance of students deemed “severely absent” (below 50%) and all interventions, and maintain regular (weekly minimum) contact with children not attending school
* Will not authorise any term time holiday requests (unless in exceptional circumstances and only at the Head’s discretion whose decision is final
* Will only use FPNs as a last resort and only for term time holidays
* Will only put children on Part time timetables by approval of the Headteacher and for a time limited period (six weeks).
* Each governing body should nominate one governor to take a monitoring responsibility for attendance issues. Other governors may also play a more active role in monitoring individual cases where this is part of the school’s attendance policy.
* Will ensure that the RS(H)E programme responds to age specific, issue driven attendance issues
* Maintain responsibility for the attendance of their children who are placed on alternative provision, and complete welfare calls to students who transfer schools, and opt for Elective Home Education (all children who opt to EHE

**3. Role of parents/carers and pupils**

‘Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996 parents/carers are responsible for making sure that their children of compulsory school age receive efficient full-time education that is suitable to the child’s age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs the child may have. This can be by regular attendance at school, alternative provision, or by education otherwise’ (Guidance on Education Related Parenting Contracts, Parenting Orders and Penalty Notices DCSF 2007).

We expect:

* Parents/carers to be responsible for ensuring their child attends school regularly.
* our parents/carers to report their child’s absence from school on the first day of absence and to confirm the reason in writing on their child’s return to school.
* that where there are concerns about a pupil’s attendance parents/carers are expected to work with school staff and other services to address concerns about attendance.
* Parents/carers are expected to support school attendance by avoiding family holidays during term time. Headteachers will only authorise a Leave of Absence from school in exceptional circumstances and these do not include term time holidays. Headteachers will ask the LA to issue a penalty notice for holidays taken during term time.
* In general, good practice would suggest that schools should expect all children to remain on site at lunchtimes unless the parent/carer has sought permission and has had permission confirmed (in writing) that the child will return home for lunch.

**4. Role of other agencies**

USP and its schools work closely with a range of agencies to address school attendance issues. In addition, protocols with other Council services and the health services help to identify any children or young people who do not have a school place and refer them on to the ESS. Other services, including Early Help also identify school attendance issues and work actively to resolve them.

**5. Legal powers**

If a parent fails to ensure that their child attends school regularly, the schools and the MAT have the power to take legal action against them by issuing a FPN and also requesting that the Local Authority apply for an Education Supervision Order in the Family Proceedings Court. Parenting contracts are also recommended as a means of supporting parents and avoiding the need for legal action. Gateshead Council uses a 6-week case management system to allow parents an opportunity to improve their child(ren) attendance before consideration is given for legal action to be taken for non-attendance. This involves the setting of targets for pupil attendance, which if not met can result in the prosecution of parents or the issuing of a Penalty Notice.

Penalty Notices will be used as a precursor or alternative to legal action, in appropriate cases.

The aims of the Non-Attendance Procedures are to ensure the regular school attendance of children and young people. Following the work undertaken by schools/academies and other services and at the end of the 6-week case management process the School Attendance Panel will consider the implementation of legal procedures should a child or young person’s attendance warrant it. Although for a significant number of children school interventions will result in an improvement in their attendance, where these interventions are unsuccessful, the deterrent effect of fines or legal action may influence positive change.

We also recognise that in a number of cases the possibility of prosecution or prosecution itself does not positively impact on the child’s attendance or parental/carer’s attitude

**6. Information sharing and Pupil Tracking**

Regulations provide that a child’s name should not be removed from the school roll except in specific circumstances (EHE and or In Year Transfer. Schools/Academies will be expected to inform and liaise with the Local Authority before removing a child’s name from the school roll (unless it has been established that the pupil has been admitted to another school and Common Transfer File (CTF) procedures have been followed or the pupil has been permanently excluded by the school). Removal in any other case will be not being accepted.

**7. Data collection and attendance targets**

Our schools will supply attendance data to the DfE annually for a number of years and are now required to supply this information on a termly basis.

**8. Celebrating good and improving attendance**

All our schools are encouraged to promote good attendance achievement using a range of initiatives, including celebrating good and improving attendance. The Trust and its schools will continue to find ways to celebrate good and improving attendance and as a Trust we support the development of an intrinsic reward strategy.

**How we will know the strategy is working - key outcomes**

If the strategy is working, then the key outcomes we would expect to see are:

1. improved levels of attendance – Top Quartile for all schools. The current Trust target is 96.5%.

2. No absence for holidays in term time

3. Less than 1% of all children missing for unauthorised absence

4. All schools have a supportive and proactive strategy to promoting good attendance

5. Information sharing agreements in place with all partner agencies to identify children without a school place

6. Persistent absence in all our schools is below 10%

7. All schools have a pro-active approach to supporting students with above average levels of PA back into school

8. All our schools are working towards achieving Inclusion Quality Mark

Monitoring and evaluation Progress in relation to the Attendance Strategy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

**Related Policies**

• Children Missing Education Strategy

• Policy for the Education of Traveller Children

• Referrals for Legal Intervention – Guidance for Schools

• Penalty Notice for Unauthorised Leave of Absence During Term Time – Information for Schools

• Legal Intervention for Non School Attendance – Information for Parents/carers

• Information about PACE interviews (for parents)

• School Attendance – Information for Parents

• School Attendance Orders: Policy and Procedure

• Elective Home Education Strategy

• Pupil Placement Panel (secondary)

• Primary Fair Access Panel

• Support for primary school with children who have social, emotional and mental health needs

• Provision for pupils who are unable to access mainstream education

• Anti-bullying policy