

GFM Attendance Matters and The Attendance Panel Aims and Protocol Guiding Principles

The Gosport and Fareham Multi Academy Trust (GFM) seeks to ensure that all its learners receive an education which maximises opportunities for each child to reach his or her full potential. Research shows a strong link between good attendance and increased achievement.

We aim to work in partnership with parents and other agencies to strive towards every child reaching a minimum of 96% attendance and impeccable punctuality to ensure that each child can get the best out of the educational opportunities provided.

By working in partnership with parents and other agencies we are able to ensure that we have clear and robust strategies in place to manage and promote regular attendance and punctuality for all learners across the Trust.

In order to manage and promote regular attendance The Gosport and Fareham Multi Academy Trust will;

- Keep parents/carers updated on attendance via letters, newsletters and our websites.
- Report to parents/carers on how their child is achieving in school and how their child's attendance is impacting on this
- Celebrate good and improved school attendance and reward this
- Monitor individual learner attendance
- Review attendance on a regular basis and identify any learner falling below 96%. Identify, monitor and review trends and patterns in attendance
- Ensure monitoring of attendance and identification of learners falling below 96% leads to actions and interventions that secure improvements in attendance.

The Law

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on all parents/carers to ensure that children in their care receive an efficient, full-time education. Parents/carers who are not meeting their duty can be brought before the Magistrates Court.

In Education Law, Section 576 Education Act 1996, a parent is defined as;

1. All natural (biological), whether they are married or not.
2. Any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person (this could be a step-parent, guardian other relative).
3. Any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person.

A person has care of a child or young person if they are the person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child.

Types of Absence: authorised and unauthorised

Parents are required to inform the school of the reason for absences, however, it is schools that will make the decision whether to authorise or unauthorise the absence. Schools will make this decision based on the information available to them. Parents are encouraged to provide as much information as possible and information such as appointment cards, medication or application for leave of absence will assist schools in making this decision.

Absence can be authorised by the school if any of the following circumstances apply:

1. Sickness or unavoidable cause (an unavoidable cause relating to the child, not the parent)
2. Leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances (authorised by the Head Teacher)
3. Days of religious observance (for the religion followed by the parents)
4. Transport provided by an Education Authority is unexpectedly unavailable

For long or frequent periods of sickness absence, the school will require you to provide medical evidence to authorise the absence.

An **unauthorised absence** is any absence for which the school has not given permission or where the parent/carer has been unable to provide a genuine reason.

Please note, schools cannot authorise term time holidays unless exceptional circumstances dictate. We define exceptional as: rare, significant, unavoidable and short.

Leave of Absence Request

It should be noted specifically that;

- Parents/carers are required to complete a Leave of Absence form from the school.
- Parents/carers will be notified of a decision within 7 days of the request being received by the school.
- Leave of Absence requests will be carefully considered with individual circumstances taken into account.
- In instances where parents/carers do not communicate an absence, the absence will automatically be unauthorised.

Absence and Attendance Codes

The MAT ensures that absence and attendance are recorded using codes as advised by Department of Education.

Monitoring

When there is a need to notify parents/carers when we are worried about their child's attendance then we will follow the procedure below.

1. First Day Absence - if a learner is absent and the school has received no notification then school office staff will make contact with home by text or phone call. In cases where no communication has been established on the day of the absence, the school will contact home by phone call or text to establish the reason for absence.
2. If average attendance falls below 96% and a negative trend has been established then parents/carers will be contacted by the school to address the periods of absence (either by text, in person, via phone call or through home visit)
3. If attendance continues to decline, staff will seek reasons for absence. However, following a monitoring period, if there is still no improvement then, in line with the Hampshire County Council Code of Conduct for tackling poor attendance, additional steps will be taken to address the issues.

Please note, a A GFM Attendance Panel has also been established. This panel consists of representatives from across the GFM and will convene where necessary. Information regarding the panel is detailed below.

In order to manage and promote the regular attendance we advise parents to;

- Impress on their children the importance of regular school attendance by keeping absences to a minimum and ensuring that children are only out of school when they are too sick to attend.
- Contact the school on the first day of absence to inform of the reason for absence and when the child is expected to return.
- Keep the school informed daily if the absence is likely to continue so that school and partner agencies can ensure that amendments or alternatives can be made to provision if required.
- Provide school with any medical appointment cards, and where ever possible make appointments out of school hours. Where this is not possible parents will ensure that children attend prior to or following their appointment.
- Attend any meetings called by the school and/or partner agencies to discuss attendance.

In order to manage and promote punctuality The GFM will;

- Record any pupils who attend school late and how many minutes late
- Monitor individual pupil's punctuality in order to identify where there may be issues
- Notify parents/carers when we are worried about their child's punctuality by letter of telephone call/text
- If lateness continues then the procedure for non-attendance will be followed.

What is the purpose of the Attendance Panel Meeting?

The fundamental purpose of this forum is to improve attendance and challenge questionable absences. Parents/carers will be asked to meet with the GFM Attendance Panel to justify the reasons for absence where anomalies exist. Following an Attendance Panel, if there is no improvement/change in the pupil's school attendance, or the GFM has reason to believe that parents/carers have been dishonest about attendance, the GFM has the right to follow the legal process for non-attendance.

How will a parent/carer be invited to an Attendance Panel Meeting?

A letter, addressed to the parents/carers, will be posted to the home address of a pupil about whom there are attendance concerns. Parents/carers will be given ten working days' notice of a meeting. If they are unable to make the date outlined, the school would need to be contacted in order to organise an alternative date within ten days from the receipt of the letter.

Who will attend the Attendance Panel Meeting?

- Attendance Panel Chair - senior GFM employee
- GFM Attendance Officer or Inclusion Leader who make notes
- Senior member of staff from school presenting the school view
- Parents/carers

What is the agenda of the Attendance Panel Meeting?

- The Chair will organise introductions
- Chair fully explains the purpose of the meeting i.e. (child's full name)
- School representative(s) outline cause for concern – provide attendance records and any mitigating evidence

- Response by parents/carers
- Evidence from external agencies if necessary
- Questions may be asked by the Chair or Attendance Officer/Inclusion Leader to support actions moving forward
- The Panel will consider the information given and either:
 1. Outline how a supportive action plan will be implemented to increase attendance
 2. Set attendance targets to be worked towards
 3. Start the legal process for poor attendance
- Chair confirms a review meeting if required - date and venue to be notified in writing by school

Decisions surrounding the 'next steps' will be made away from the meeting. Parents/carers will be informed within 72 hours.

Sample Action Plan Template

School	Date of Plan
Pupil name	DOB

Pupil perspective (if necessary)	% attendance including trends or reoccurring patterns
Parents/carers perspective	Possible issues preventing attendance (family situation, educational history, support agencies working with pupil etc)
Specific Needs (SEND, medical, SEMH)	

Key Point	Action	By Whom	Timescale

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Action Plan Agreed by:

Chair of Attendance Panel Meeting _____ **Date** _____

Representatives from School _____ **Date** _____

Parents/Carers _____ **Date** _____

GFM Attendance Officer _____ **Date** _____