



## **EDUCATION MY LIFE MATTERS**

### **ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY POLICY**

Regular and punctual school attendance is important. Learners need to attend school regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them by law. At EMLM we fully recognise our responsibilities to ensure learners are in school and that they arrive on time. When learners attend regularly and arrive on time, they get access to learning for the maximum number of days and hours across the school year.

Learners who are persistently late or absent soon fall behind with their learning. Learners who are absent from school frequently develop large gaps in their learning, that will impact on their progress and their ability to meet age related learning expectations. This attendance policy has been written to adhere to the relevant Children Acts, Education Acts, Regulations and Guidance from the Department for Education.

It applies to all learners registered at this school. The policy will be made available to all parents/carers, visitors and professionals, either via the school website, or as a hard copy document available from school office admin. A hard copy is given to all new admissions.

Parents/carers have the legal responsibility for ensuring their child has good attendance. EMLM will work together with other professionals and agencies to ensure that all learners are encouraged and supported to develop good attendance habits. Procedures in this policy are followed to ensure this happens.

#### **1. STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE**

At EMLM we believe that attendance and punctuality is vital to the well-being and prospects of all of our learners. Attendance and punctuality are intrinsically linked to our strategy for accelerating progress and raising achievement and attainment. This policy provides the framework within which all learners, staff, parents, carers and external agencies can contribute to the development and maintenance of a learning environment where high attendance and excellent punctuality is the norm.

## 1.1 AIMS

Through this Policy we aim to:

- Improve learners' readiness for integration and engagement with learning by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality.
- Achieve a minimum of 95% attendance for all learners, apart from those with chronic health issues.
- Create an ethos in which good attendance and punctuality are recognised as the norm and seen to be valued by parents/carers of learners in the school.
- Raise awareness of parents, carers and learners of the importance of uninterrupted attendance and punctuality.
- Work in partnership with learners, parents, staff and the Education Welfare Service
- Promote a positive and welcoming environment where learners are encouraged to attend regularly and punctually because learners feel safe, secure and valued, and encouraged to develop a sense of their own responsibility.
- Establish a pattern of monitoring of attendance which ensures consistency in recognising achievement and dealing with difficulties.
- Establish the key role of all staff in promoting good attendance.

Education My Life Matters (CIC) Independent School & Alternative Provision maintains and promotes good attendance and punctuality through:

- Raising awareness of attendance and punctuality issues among all staff, parents, carers and learners.
- Ensuring that parents/carers understand the responsibility they hold for ensuring their child attends regularly and punctually.
- Maintaining effective means of communication with parents, learners, staff and members of the IEB on school attendance matters.
- Developing and implementing procedures for identifying, reporting and reviewing cases of poor attendance and persistent lateness.
- Supporting learners who have been experiencing any difficulties at home or at school which are preventing good attendance.
- Developing and implementing procedures to follow up non-attendance at school.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

### **Authorised Absence**

An absence is classified as authorised when a learner has been away from school for a legitimate reason. The school has received notification from a parent/carer, and the school deems it an absence meeting the criteria for authorization. For example, if a learner has been unwell and the parent telephones and provides medical evidence which explains the absence.

*Only the school can make an absence authorised. Parents/carers do not have this authority. Consequently, not all absences supported by parents will be classified as authorised.*

### **Unauthorised Absence**

An absence is classified as unauthorised when a learner is away from school without the permission of the school.

Therefore, the absence is unauthorised if a learner is away from school without good reason, even with the support of a parent.

### **3. PROCEDURES**

EMLM IAP will undertake the following procedures to support good attendance:

- Maintain appropriate registration processes
- Maintain appropriate attendance data
- Communicate clearly the attendance procedures and expectations to all staff, parents/carers and learners.
- Have consistent and systematic daily records which give detail of any absence and lateness
- Follow up absences and persistent lateness if parents/carers have not communicated with the school
- Inform parents/carers what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absence
- Strongly discourage unnecessary absence through holidays taken during term time
- Work with parents to improve individual learner's attendance and punctuality
- Refer to the Local Authority any learner whose attendance causes concern and where parents/carers have not responded to school initiatives to improve.
- Report attendance statistics to Lewisham LA and the DfE where requested.
- Ensure staff awareness of the need to raise any attendance or punctuality concerns to the Strategic Education Lead

### **4. RESPONSIBILITIES**

All members of school staff have a responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and punctuality. The following includes a more specific list of the kinds of responsibilities that individuals might have.

#### **Strategic and Operational Leads**

The Strategic Education Lead and Operational Lead are responsible for ensuring good attendance and punctuality of all learners:

- Monitoring of school attendance
- Identifying trends in authorised and unauthorised absence
- Keeping an overview of individual learners' attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by learners and their parents/ carers and reporting concerns to the SLT.
- Contacting parent/carers where concerns are raised about absence including issuing appropriate letters and arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues
- Following up absences with immediate requests for explanation which should be noted on electronic register
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised
- Monitoring follow-up once actions have been taken to correct attendance concerns

- Recording details of learners who arrive late
- Making referrals to the Local Authority
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion with the EWO
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence.

### **Administration Staff**

The Administrator is responsible for ensuring effectiveness of EMLM's Administrative office on a day to-day basis. On a day-to-day basis School Admin is responsible for:

- Collating and recording registration and attendance information.
- Taking and recording messages from parents/carers regarding absence. Passing reasons for absence to the Strategic Lead to request judgement for absence authorised or not
- Bringing to the attention of parents/carers the content of this policy
- Recording details of learners who go home at times other than the end of the school day
- Sending standard letters regarding attendance to parents/carers
- These calls are EMLM's first response and may involve a degree of problem-solving support and advice to rectify the situation.
- Calls home are logged, and persistent lateness will be raised with the Senior Leadership Team.
- If a Learner is a Child Looked After (CLA) then the absence will be reported to the Virtual School and Social Worker by email. Welfare Call is also updated daily.
- Attendance printouts are emailed to partner schools/Local Authorities regularly.

### **Teachers**

Teachers are responsible for:

- Keeping an overview of individual learner attendance, looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by learners and their parents/ carers
- Informing members of the school's senior leadership team where there are concerns and acting upon them
- Providing background information to support referrals
- Emphasising with learners the importance of good attendance and promptness
- Discussing attendance issues at meetings where necessary

### **Mentors**

- To act as role models by being punctual to every lesson/registration and to greet learners on arrival
- To actively support the broader EMLM policy by encouraging high attendance and punctuality, issuing consequences for lateness and stressing the importance of full attendance.

## Parents/Carers

Parents/Carers are responsible for:

- Ensuring their child attends school regularly and punctually unless prevented from doing so by illness or attendance at a medical appointment.
- Contacting the school office on each morning of absence.
- Informing the school in advance of any medical appointments in school time. For the absence to be recorded as a medical absence we do require evidence from the doctor or dentist. (Appointment card/letter)
- Talking to the school as soon as possible about any learner's reluctance to come to school so that problems can be quickly identified and dealt with.

## 5. REGISTRATION

Registration is done electronically. However, if the system fails, school office will provide a paper register.

Any learner who is absent must be recorded at the beginning of the morning and afternoon session. The office must complete the attendance register by 9.10 am and by 1.10pm.

All attendance records are documented using excel. Attendance registers are legal documents, and these must be kept secure and preserved for a period of three years after the date they were last used.

## 6. LATENESS

Learners who arrive after 9.10am will be recorded as late. Records are kept of those learners who are late; this is documented on the electronic register for each pupil (Attendance code L). Any learner, who arrives for school later than 9.20am, will be marked as having an unauthorised absence for the morning. (Attendance code U).

If a learner has attended a dentist or doctor's appointment and subsequently come to school later than 9.20am, appointment card required, the absence will be recorded as a medical absence (Attendance code M).

Where there have been persistent incidents of lateness parents/carers will receive a letter advising them of the concerns and the school will provide opportunities for parents/carers to seek support and advice to address these issues. If issues are identified at the weekly attendance monitoring checks, parents/carers could receive follow up letters.

## 7. ABSENCES

Parents/carers should contact the school on each day of their child's absence. When parents/carers notify us of their child's absence it is important that they provide us with details of the reason for their absence.

All absences are recorded as either authorised or unauthorised on the computer. It is important that we receive accurate information from parents with reasons for the child's absence. This information

is used to determine whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised. It is the Strategic Lead who has the responsibility to determine whether absences are authorised or unauthorised.

Where we have not received reasons for a learner's absence then we contact the parent/carer by phone (verbal) to request details. If we are unable to ascertain the reason for the absence, the absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence (Attendance Code O) and this may be referred to the Education Welfare Officer.

## **8. FIRST DAY CONTACT**

EMLM operates a first day calling system. Parents must telephone the school office before 9AM on the first day of the learner's absence. In the event of a telephone call not being forthcoming from the parent/carer, the office will use the learner's listed contact number to contact the parent or carer to establish the reason and the anticipated length of the absence. First day contact is to eliminate the possibility of truancy.

The telephone call is accepted as a provisional reason on the first day of absence, but admin staff must be clearly satisfied that the caller is authentic. Admin staff will log the information regarding the learner's absence. The learner must provide a note written and signed by their parent on their return to school.

The school will always seek to establish reasons for absences.

If a Learner is a Child Looked After (CLA) then the absence will be reported to the Virtual School and Social Worker by email.

Attendance printouts are emailed to partner schools/Local Authorities on a weekly basis.

## **9. MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS**

Every effort must be made by parents/carers to arrange medical appointments outside of school hours. Where appointments take place during school sessions then parents/carers are asked to provide to the school a doctor's note or appointment card or note in order that the absence may be authorised. The learner is expected to attend school where possible either side of the appointment in order to minimise missed education. Only in exceptional circumstances will whole day absence for a medical reason be authorised.

## **10. FAMILY HOLIDAYS**

With effect from September 2013 the government abolished the right of Headteachers' to authorise absence specifically for holidays of up to 10 days per year if special circumstances exist. It is not the policy of EMLM to authorise holidays during term time. Where a learner is absent for the purpose of a holiday, then the parent could be issued with a penalty notice.

### **Leave of Absence**

If there are exceptional circumstances that necessitate a request for leave, an application form must be completed to make the request. This application form can be requested from the school office.

## **11. ADDRESSING ATTENDANCE CONCERNS**

The school expects attendance of at least 95%.

Where a learner's attendance record does not meet this standard, the school will work with parents/carers to seek to improve the position. If, despite support actions implemented by the school, attendance fails to improve, then the school will have a responsibility to make a referral to the corresponding learner's Local Authority Educational Welfare Service.

The Education Welfare Service (EWS) will issue penalty notices to parents where there has been a referral to EWO from the school as part of the school's processes to address poor attendance patterns.

In addition, education related parenting orders are available by direct application by a school or LA to the Magistrates' Court as an ancillary order following a successful prosecution by the LA for irregular attendance or breach of a school attendance order.

The Strategic Lead checks and monitors attendance. Learners with low attendance (usually below 90%) will be referred to their respective Local Authority's Education Welfare Officer who will work with the school to improve attendance.

## **12. MONITORING ATTENDANCE**

Attendance is monitored on a weekly basis.

The school office has the responsibility for ensuring that all attendance data is accurately recorded on the Sims attendance software.

Where attendance concerns are identified parents/carers are invited to a meeting to discuss the concerns. In addition, attendance matters can also be discussed at learner's arranged TAL (Team Around the Learner) meetings, and appropriate actions identified and followed through.

### **THE OFFENCE OF FAILING TO ENSURE REGULAR ATTENDANCE**

1. There are two offences relating to parental responsibility for ensuring regular attendance at school: if a registered learner is absent without authorisation from the school or alternative provision then the parent is guilty of an offence under section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996; if the parent knows that the child is failing to attend school regularly and fails to cause him or her to do so, he/she is guilty of an offence under section 444 (1A) of the Education Act 1996.
2. No offence is committed if the parent proves any of the following statutory grounds:
  - The learner was ill or prevented from attending by any avoidable cause
  - The learner's absence was authorised by the school.
  - The absence was on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the parent belongs.
  - The Local Authority are under a duty to provide transport to the school and have failed to do so, or in certain circumstances, that the school is not within walking distance or the learner's home and the local authority has made no suitable arrangements for the learner's transport to and from the School;

- If the learner has been excluded under Section 52 of the Education Act 2002 (as they do not have to attend the school, they are excluded from) provided the learner attends alternative provision as directed.
- If the learner is receiving education otherwise than by regular attendance at school (for example by home education); or
- If the learner has no fixed abode and the parent can show that their trade or business requires them to travel, and the learner has attended the school regularly as the nature of the trade or business permits, and the learner has attended the School for at least 200 sessions during the preceding 12 months from the date on which the proceedings were instituted.

## **PENALTY NOTICE**

### **1. What is a Penalty Notice?**

The law says that parents/carers whose children of compulsory school age are absent from school without good reason committing an offence, and those parents may be prosecuted in the Magistrates' Court.

Section 23 of the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003 introduced additional powers under section 444 of the Education Act 1996 authorising local authorities to issue Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absence from school.

Section 444A and 444B of the Education Act 1996 (introduced by Section 23 of the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003) introduced penalty notices as an alternative to prosecution under section 444(1). Parents may discharge potential liability for conviction for an offence under Section 444 (1) by paying a penalty. There is no legal requirement for there first to have been a penalty notice before proceeding to prosecution.

### **2. When will a Penalty Notice be issued?**

In every case a learner will have lost a minimum of 10 sessions (5 school days) of unauthorised absence during the current term before Penalty Notice is considered

A parent/carer will be issued with a formal written warning of the intention to issue a Penalty Notice.

On receipt of this warning a parent will have 15 school days to improve the learner's attendance, in that time the learner must have no unauthorised absences from the school. If the learner's attendance improves and there are no further unauthorised absences, the parent will not receive a penalty notice.

There is no statutory right of appeal once a notice has been issued.

Details of payment arrangements will be included on the Penalty Notice. The penalty must be paid in full. The penalty is £60 if paid within 21 days, or £120 if paid within 28 days.

If the penalty is not paid in full within 28 days of issue, the Local Authority is required to start legal proceedings against the parent in the local Magistrates' Court for the original offence of failing to ensure the learner attends school regularly. This may lead to a fine of up to £1000.

Payment of a penalty notice discharges parents' liability for the period to which the notice relates. However, it may be the case that a prosecution is considered if the learner has further periods of unauthorised absence from school.

### **EXIT PROCEDURES FROM SCHOOL ROLL**

As learners may be temporary or short-term referrals to EMLM, there are various reasons why learners may be removed from the School roll.

- 1) Reintegration to mainstream school.
- 2) Parent/carers/learner moving away from the area.
- 3) Referring agency terminates placement.
- 4) Learner not ending for long periods of time.
- 5) Learner permanently excluded according to disciplinary policy.

In response to DfES Circular No. 10/99 on School Attendance:

- 1) Absences will be recorded in the electronic registers and statistically as 'authorised' and 'unauthorised'.
- 2) Computerised attendance records are in place.
- 3) Absence statistics, with separate unauthorised figures are available from the administration team on request.

The circular also outlines causes for concern and the need for the school to carry out strategies to deal with these concerns. These include:

- 1) Weekly attendance statistics
- 2) Daily lists of absentees
- 3) Following up procedures on the first day of absence
- 4) Following up long/suspicious absences
- 5) The taking of electronic subject registers
- 6) Reward policy for excellent attendance and punctuality