



EDUCATION MY LIFE MATTERS ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY POLICY

Approved by:	Independent Executive Board	Date: March 2023
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This policy should be read in conjunction with 'Keeping Children Safe in Education, Statutory guidance for schools and colleges September 2022' and all the school's safeguarding policies and procedures.

Aims and Objectives:

At EMLM attendance and punctuality is vital to the well-being and prospects of all of our learners.

We realise that our Learners need to attend school regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them and so that they achieve a good standard of academic and social success. We also understand we need to work closely with our parents/carers and outside support agencies in order that this policy is successful.

At EMLM we aim to:

- Ensure all Learners are given the maximum potential to achieve by attending school regularly
- 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
- Increase parents' and Learners' awareness of the importance of regular attendance
- Work in partnership with learners, parents, staff and the Education Welfare Service to improve attendance
- Promote a positive and welcoming environment where learners are encouraged to attend regularly and punctually because learners feel safe, secure and valued, and are 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

Good attendance is important because:

- Research shows a direct link between high achievement and good attendance
- High attenders make better progress, both socially and academically than pupils whose attendance falls lower than national targets (95%)
- Regular attenders find school routines, school work and friendships easier to cope with
- Regular attenders cope more easily with transitions i.e. KS3 to KS4, vocational training, college and/or employment

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 Board Members 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

In order to give every opportunity for our learners to attend EMLM regularly, we consider the following:

Academics and well-being

Well-being supports, including mental health services, lunch programs and opportunities for movement and physical activity are all important in promoting school attendance. For Learners who are struggling to learn key concepts or are falling behind their peers, an integrated approach to support academic success and well-being, linked to their interests, is essential.

Building relationships

A sense of belonging and connectedness is critical to engagement, learning and attendance for our Learners. They need to feel like they matter to someone at EMLM – someone who notices when they're not there but who also welcomes them when they are.

Our relationships need to be purposefully fostered between and among Learners, staff, families and communities. Mentorship programs, peer buddies, leadership opportunities and community experiential projects are some examples of ways in which we support relationship building.

Data needed

Data is important for understanding attendance -who is at school, who is not and if not, what the reasons are. EMLM collects, uses and reports on data. We have a system to identify Learners attendance patterns which help us to proactively support learners and families.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Families/carers of Learners at the school should:

- Ensure their child attends school regularly and punctually unless they are significantly unwell
- Ensure that the school office is notified if their child is absent and provide reasons for this, each morning of absence
- Attempt to make all non-emergency appointments out of school hours or during school holidays
- Where this is not possible, inform 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)
- Provide medical evidence after the 2nd day of absence where the Learner's illness/absence is frequent or prolonged
- Work in partnership with the EMLM to resolve issues that may lead to non-attendance
- Ensure EMLM has current contact numbers; this includes all telephone numbers and at least two emergency contact details

All members of school staff have a responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and punctuality.

Attendance Lead and Leadership Team

The Attendance Lead and the Leadership Team will work closely together and are responsible for ensuring good attendance and punctuality of all learners:

- To ensure the ethos of EMLM contributes to Learners feeling connected, safe and valued
- Inform families during induction meetings of the importance of regular punctual attendance
- Inform families via newsletter, parent consultations, email, telephone call of the need to attend regularly and the procedures to follow for any absences
- Listen and respond to families and Learners on matters relating to reasons for non-attendance
- Be sensitive to the needs of individual families/carers and this should be reflected in the way in which attendance issues are addressed
- Make every effort to maximise attendance rates
- Maintain registers, taken twice each day
- Ensure attendance register is completed by 9.10 am and by 1.10pm
- Record kept of each learner who arrives late and reason noted
- Contact all families/carers who have not reported Learners absence and note explanation for absence on electronic register
- To tailor support to families such as advising about routines, parenting information, workshops
- Discuss attendance during weekly Safeguarding meetings
- To provide weekly attendance data to Leadership in school for monitoring purposes
- Communicate clearly the attendance procedures and expectations to all staff, parents/carers and learners
- Inform parents/carers what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absence - Appendix 2 & 4
- Identify trends in authorised and unauthorised absence
- Ensure staff awareness of the need to raise any attendance or punctuality concerns to the Attendance Lead
- 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 Leadership Team
- Contacting parent/carers where concerns are raised about absence including issuing appropriate letters and arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised
- Monitoring follow-up once actions have been taken to correct attendance concerns
- Making referrals to the Local Authority and/or relevant external agencies
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion with the Education Welfare Officer
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence
- Report attendance statistics to Lewisham LA and the DfE where requested.

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 parent/carers regarding absence. Communicating reasons for absence to the Attendance Lead to request judgement for absence authorised or not
- Bringing to the attention of parent/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

Role of all EMLM staff

- Proactively work to maximise attendance rates
- 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
- Support parents/carers in ensuring regular and punctual attendance of Learners and respond to any issues which may lead to non-attendance
- Be sensitive to the needs of individual parents/carers and this should be reflected in the way which attendance issues are addressed
- Informing members of the school's senior leadership team and Attendance Lead 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
- Consider attendance and punctuality from a whole school perspective
- Monitor the link between attendance and achievement
- Reward good attendance -see Appendix 1

Role of the Class Teacher & Learning Mentors:

- To create an environment which makes all learners feel included, safe and motivated
- Registers are completed by 9.10am
- To know which Learners have poor attendance and to look for any trends in non-attendance
- To warmly welcome all Learners each morning and explicitly welcome back Learners who have been absent

- To liaise with the Attendance Lead when there are concerns regarding attendance of pupils
- Ensure good communication between class teachers, learning mentors and the Attendance Officer, relaying messages when necessary
- Include in each Learner's annual report to his/her parents/carers information relating to the number of absences that the pupil has accrued during that school year. The school may also comment on levels of authorised absence where these are considered to be a cause for concern
- To discuss the impact of low attendance on learning with families at consultation meetings where appropriate
- Reward good and improving attendance –see below
- Learning Mentors will provide Outreach support to learners to encourage good attendance

EMLM will also:

- Follow up any unexplained absences by phone call, email, text message and letters as necessary on the morning of the absence
- Telephone all listed contacts on a Learner's records if the number one contact is unobtainable
- If EMLM have any Safeguarding concerns, then the police will be notified and any external agencies professionals who are working with the family
- Learners with 90% attendance or less, whatever the reason for the absence, are classified as persistent absentees –see appendix

When attendance becomes a concern, EMLM will:

- In the first instance send letters via email to all Learners who attendance drops below 95% and offer support to families/carers and the Learner
- If attendance does not improve and continues to fall we will arrange school based meetings to discuss what support can be offered
- If the attendance does not improve and falls below 90% then we may have to liaise with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO)/other agencies to help highlight the Learner's attendance concerns and to provide support in improving the attendance of the Learner.

Appendix 1:

Rewards and Incentives for Punctuality and Regular Attendance and Improving Attendance:

1. Weekly recognition for each learner who has good attendance
2. Half termly recognition –Learners who attend regularly and are punctual will be awarded with a certificate
3. End of year recognition - Learners who receive 95% or above attendance and punctuality will receive a voucher for £10.00 from WHS
4. Learners whose attendance improves over time will be acknowledged. Families/carers will receive a letter which congratulates them on improved attendance

Appendix 2:

Absence Procedures Authorised Absence

Absences will be treated as **authorised** if:

- The learner is absent with authorised leave (defined as leave granted by the Leadership team)
- The Learner is ill and has symptoms (medical evidence required for 4 days or more or for frequent periods of absence) or prevented from attending due to unavoidable causes
- The Learner is attending an emergency medical/dental appointment that cannot be arranged outside school hours (where evidence has been received)
- The absence occurs on a day set aside for religious observance; if extended days are taken these will be unauthorised and liaison may be necessary with faith leaders in the community)
- The Learner is attending an interview for placement at another school, or college or job opportunities (evidence has been provided)
- The Learner is participating in an approved public performance or sporting activity which are not deemed detrimental to the Learner's education

EMLM does not grant leave of absence for the purpose of a holiday. This will be considered an unauthorised absence -see Appendix 4

Absence will be treated as unauthorised if:

- No explanation is forthcoming from the family/carer
- EMLM is dissatisfied with the explanation
- The Learner is absent for an unexceptional special occasion
- The Learner is away from school on a family holiday
- Where continued patterns of absence are evident and no medical evidence has been received

Appendix 3:

The Policy on Leave:

'Leave' in relation to EMLM means leave granted by any person authorised to do so (the Leadership Team or the Board Members). The Leadership team will only consider authorising an absence during term time where an application has made **in advance in writing requesting leave of absence during term time** and where he/she is satisfied that there are exceptional or special circumstances to justify the request. Requests will not be granted for the purpose of a holiday.

Leave of absence will be granted sparingly if there are special considerations and will not normally be granted for more than 3 days per school year for any Learner.

Exceptional Circumstances and Special Considerations for Leave:

- Death of a close family member
- Sudden loss of housing through eviction or domestic violence up to a maximum of 3 days
- Out of school programmes such as music, arts or sport with credited organisations
- Religious observance subject to a maximum number of 3 days in any one academic year

Specific Circumstances not included on the List:

- Illness of a relative
- Prison visits – most prison visits can be achieved during weekends and holidays but there may be exceptions when a person is held in prison a long way from home and EMLM may believe there is justification to grant leave

This list is not exhaustive and each case will be dealt with according to the circumstances presented.

Appendix 4:

Sanctions for an Unauthorised Leave of Absence

In the first instance, EMLM will arrange meetings to discuss all possible options to avoid sanctions. However, in the case of persistent absences, where all other options have been exhausted, a Penalty Notice may be issued following discussions with the Leadership Team and the Education Welfare Officer. Penalty notices are fines of £60.00 or £120.00 which are issued to each parent responsible for their child's attendance. EMLM will proactively work with families/carers to avoid penalty notices being issued and these will be issued as a last resort.

Child Missing from Education

In cases where unauthorised leave of absence exceeds 20 days or more but where there has been no contact with the family/carers, EMLM will complete a Children Missing Education Form and submit it to ChildrenMissingEducation@Lewisham.gov.uk . Any external agencies working with the Learner will also be informed immediately so that all relevant steps can be implemented.

Persistent Absence:

Once a Learner's attendance falls to 90% for whatever reason, he/she is automatically defined by the Department of Education (DfE) irrespective of the reason for absence as a Persistent Absentee. Persistent absence is a serious problem for children. Much of the work they miss when they are off school is never made up; these gaps in their learning leave children at a considerable disadvantage for the remainder of their school career. Statistics show a direct link between poor attendance and under-achievement particularly at GCSE.

EMLM will work in partnership with our families/carers to improve matters and seek all alternatives to ensure Learners attend school.

Appendix 5:

Punctuality

At EMLM we continue to insist on punctuality as we want to support the development of good timekeeping habits. Persistent lateness does not constitute full school attendance (Section 444 of the Education Act, 1996).

The school day normally begins at 9.00 and the Learners are required to be in school by then. If a Learners arrives after the register has closed at 9.10, they will be marked as 'late'. If they arrive 31 minutes after 9 they will receive an unauthorised absence for the morning session. All Learners arriving late have to sign in.

Punctuality will be monitored by EMLM and meetings will be arranged with families/carers, as and when necessary, if lateness is an issue. EMLM will proactively work with families/carers to avoid penalty notices being issued for lateness.

Exceptional Circumstances and Special Consideration for Late Arrivals:

- Adverse weather
- Travel conditions

Appendix 6:

Education Act 1996, Section 444 as amended by Section 82 and 109 of the Education and Inspection Act 2006 444 Offence:

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