



# **ATTENDANCE GUIDE FOR PARENTS**

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**Contact**

Email: [HCattendance@that.org](mailto:HCattendance@that.org)

Telephone: 020 8573 1039

SLT Lead: Mr S Botham (Vice Principal)

## Introduction and rationale

Attendance is one of the most important elements in what makes a successful student. Various studies have been completed that show there is a significant link between attending school and being successful.

If a student's attendance is consistently 80% from Year 7 to Year 11, he/she will have effectively missed one entire year of school. However, attendance goes beyond school, it is also a life skill and is fundamental to a student's future as a citizen.

## Rationale

The aim of this document is, to ensure clarity between what is expected of the students, parents, the school, and the legal processes that are undertaken. This document will cover a variety of topics including: recording absence, evidence for a prolonged period of absence to leave of absence requests and punctuality. Of course, if after reading this you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Botham (Vice Principal) and he will be happy to help.

## Attendance Summary

The general guidance for good attendance is that students should attend school at least 96% of the time. This equates to no more than 8 days of absence across an academic year. Anything less than 90% attendance (around 20 days or more of absence across an academic year), is classed by the government as "persistently absent" and without sufficient evidence to explain this level of absence, families are open to prosecution by the local authority, in this case the London Borough of Hillingdon.

## Key Attendance Times

If your son/daughter is sick, please ensure you make contact every day before 8.00am with a reason for absence. You can contact the absence line on 020 8573 1039, choosing option 4 for Years 7 & 8 and option 5 for year 9, 10 and 11.

Punctuality is a crucial life skill, if there is a reason for lateness that is out of control of the student or the family please call the school to inform us. Students must arrive by 8:45am. Anyone arriving after this time without reason would result in having their lateness marked as "unauthorised".

## Attendance Glossary of Terms

**Authorised Absence** – The school authorises the student's absence, this could be for the following reasons:

- Sickness – (Up to 3 days in succession);
- Unavoidable medical appointments (evidence must be provided of the appointment, prior to or on the day of the appointment);
- Immediate family engagements (weddings/funerals) – 1 day approval, we do not authorise long periods of absence, such as weddings abroad;
- Approved leave of absence requests – outlined in the leave of absence section later on.
- **Persistently Absent** – Where a student's attendance drops below 90%
- **School Attendance Meeting (SAM)** – A meeting required, by law, for students whose attendance is close to (or below) 90%.

### **Day to day Attendance**

As a parent, you have a legal requirement to inform the school regarding your son/daughter being absent on a particular day. You can call the school on the main switch board where you can talk to a member of our student services team or leave a message.

If you fail to call the school, we are required, by law, to make contact with you, or a named contact if we cannot reach you. Prolonged periods of absence with no contact could result in a penalty notice fine or the school having to call the police and report your son/daughter as missing. From time to time we will make a visit to your home address.

### **Day to Day illness**

We always want to encourage students to attend! When feeling a bit poorly, sometimes getting out of bed, showering and putting uniform on, is all it takes. Coming in on days like this can make a big difference. We will always send a student home who is not well enough to be in school.

### **Commentary**

*Having sporadic days off school can quickly add up. It is often recommended to give students painkillers, plenty of water and send them in, if they really are ill, our trained First Aid team will send them home.*

### **Prolonged illness**

We do not require any evidence for illness that lasts up to three days. Anything longer than four days will require evidence (proof of illness – see below). If this is not provided, then the attendance for this period can be logged as unauthorised. If you are unsure about anything, please do not hesitate to contact the school.

### **Medical Appointments**

We understand that medical appointments may be hard to come by; you could wait weeks to see your GP and often hospitals will book appointments during school time. However, we do stress that, where possible, you seek medical appointments outside of school time and during holidays. Any medical appointments during the school day require evidence, without this we cannot authorise the absence. Students should, where possible, not be out all day for medical appointments and either come to school before hand, or return afterwards to maximise learning time.

**Example:** *Dentist and Orthodontist. Many dentist surgeries offer flexible hours of late evenings and weekends. We are unlikely to authorise a standard dentist check-up during the school day, so please organise them for outside of school time. Orthodontists, however, have limited availability and often only run during the day, we would authorise an orthodontist appointment, with evidence.*

### **Evidence Types**

Evidence is needed to prove illness (more than 3 days) and medical appointments.

We understand that GPs are reluctant to provide medical notes, especially without charge.

Evidence can be (however not exclusive to):

- Doctor's notes
- Prescriptions
- Labels from medicine that have a date within the absence period
- Appointment letters
- Referral letters

### **Prolonged absence**

For prolonged absence relating to long term medical conditions, we require more detailed evidence stating:

- Name and nature of the long-term medical condition.
- Reason related to the absence.
- In what way the condition affects school attendance.
- For how long attendance will be affected for.

Most evidence has a time limit on it, unless it is a lifelong condition. We may ask you to update the evidence periodically as the condition develops/improves.

### **When attendance declines**

Schools are required by law to discuss attendance with families when it starts to decline. We have to follow certain procedures outlined by the London Borough of Hillingdon to ensure attendance remains as high as possible. Our aim is for all students to attend school for more than 96% of the time and we take a proactive approach to attendance which declines below certain levels.

### **Commentary**

*As always, if we are aware of medical issues and have sufficient evidence to prove potential poor attendance, we will not initiate attendance protocols.*

*As attendance declines, you will receive various letters and/or phone calls from the school informing you of declining attendance and discussing how we can support individuals.*

## **STAGES OF ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION**

### **STAGE 1: When attendance falls below 96% (between 93-95.9%)**

If attendance drops between 93 and 95.9%, as Stage 1 Letter will be sent. Families should expect a phone call from the student's Form Tutor, discussing any issues, potential problems and support we can put in place. Attendance will be monitored for 2 weeks. If no improvement is noticed, the school will proceed to **Stage 2**.

### **STAGE 2: When attendance is between 90.1-92.9%**

A student at this level is close to becoming persistently absent. The student's Alliance Director or Associate Director will make contact via telephone to discuss the issues at hand and potential support needed. A meeting will be organised to agree an Attendance Contract, in which the parent/carers, the student and Hewens College will agree to some strategies to improve attendance

### **STAGE 3: Persistent Absence**

Persistent absence is where a student's attendance drops **below 90%**.

In real terms, this means that the student will have had 20 school days or more off throughout the year. As soon as this happens, parents will receive a letter warning them that attendance is now persistently absent and it needs to immediately improve and if attendance does not improve, parents could be open to legal action.

Parents will also be required to attend a School Attendance Meeting (SAM) with the Vice Principal and/or the Attendance Support Officer from Hillingdon; attendance issues will be discussed, support put in place and a target for attendance set with a review date.

SAMs are conducted in person and failure to attend these meetings could work against the family if proceedings are taken forward. Attendance will be monitored for 4 weeks. At this time, three outcomes are possible:

1. Attendance improves – This is recognised via an email and students remain closely monitored.
2. Attendance improves, but not quick enough – Next steps will be decided on a case by case basis
3. Attendance does not improve quickly.

### **STAGE 4: Continued Persistent Absence**

If attendance does not improve, the school will remove authorisation of absence without medical evidence (evidence types stated earlier).

This will be until attendance improves. During this time, if attendance remains as persistently absent and without sufficient evidence to prove illness, the school will apply for a penalty notice fine from the London Borough of Hillingdon. After the first day of unauthorised absence, you will receive a penalty notice warning letter explaining that if attendance does not improve then prosecution will be processed.

### **STAGE 5- Referral for a Fixed Penalty Notice**

If attendance still does not improve, the process will continue and could lead to further legal intervention, decided by the London Borough of Hillingdon.

Possible sentences could involve a significant fine, or even prison.

### **Commentary**

*Legal proceedings can continue across academic years, so if attendance is poor and is unauthorised in at the end of one academic year, this will continue into the new academic year in September.*

*We are required to follow certain legal procedures and have statutory duties and expectations from the Local Authority. Although this is not something we want to engage in, we do take these seriously*

### **Legal Notice and Penalty Notices**

We are required by law to inform you of the legal notice regarding potential prosecution, this is outlined in our letters and on various documents. "It is recommended that you take immediate steps to ensure school is attended regularly. If this is not achieved and there are further unauthorised absences a referral will be made to the Local Authority and you may be prosecuted in the Magistrates Court under section 444 of the Education Act 1996 for failing to ensure regular attendance at school. However, depending upon the circumstances, you may be provided with an opportunity to discharge the offence by paying a penalty notice which imposes a fine of £160, per parent, per child if paid within 28 days, reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days.

Should you fail to pay within the prescribed timescales, you will be prosecuted for the original offence." In a nutshell, this means that poor attendance is prosecuted by the London Borough of Hillingdon and in most cases they will defer prosecution for a penalty notice. However, if attendance does not improve, or penalty notices are unpaid, court proceedings will take place.

### **Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and Attendance**

We understand that from time-to-time students may suffer from anxiety and mental health issues. Early intervention is crucial with any issues involving mental health, the earlier we can support, the better. If you are worried that your son/daughter is suffering from potential mental health issues please contact the school.

With regards to SEMH and absence, we still require evidence as to why students cannot attend school, unfortunately we cannot take "anxiety" as a reason for absence without evidence. As always, this only applies for prolonged or regular absence due to mental health. We would require a letter for a doctor, therapist or counsellor explaining the following.

- A diagnosis – This does not need to be "official" but it outlines concerns and comes from a mental health professional.
- A supporting statement that this condition will affect attendance.

Having this evidence will allow us to approve absence. It will, like any evidence, need reviewing periodically.

### **Commentary**

*We do understand that appointments with mental health professionals can take time and getting “evidence” can take longer. However, we do stress that having prolonged time off school due to these issues can heighten the problem and make it hard to get into a routine. We can put support in place in a variety of ways to ensure a sense of “normality” is maintained as much as possible.*

### **Leave of Absence Requests (LOA)**

For every planned absence we request a leave of absence request form to be completed at least 4 weeks prior to the absence.

LOA forms can be found on our website and collected directly from reception.

They must be fully completed with reasons (and attached evidence where appropriate).

We review LOAs on a case-by-case basis, but as a general rule

**We do not approve leave of absence, unless there are exceptional reasons.**

**Family Holidays will not be counted as exceptional.**

We have approved the following situations in the past.

- College/apprenticeship interviews – with evidence. A maximum of 2 days in any 1 academic year.
- Religious observance- A maximum of 3 days will be considered for religious observance in any 1 academic year in accordance with the guidance from the London Borough of Hillingdon.

### **Common Example**

In general, “family holidays” are not exceptional. We have had many LOAs that state because of an “unavoidable shift change” or a “a change to a medical procedure” or “sickness or bereavement in the family”, holidays have had to be moved. The change in a medical procedure or family bereavement is exceptional, the family holiday is not. A family holiday can be taken at a different point of the year.

### **Commentary**

*As a rule of thumb we consider, “would a teacher be allowed to take this absence?” Would a teacher be allowed to take holiday to match their non-teaching spouse’s shift patterns? No. So we apply this judgement to deciding on LOAs.*

### **Other circumstances of absence**

The school is extremely thorough when investigating prolonged absence. We trust our parents to be honest with us and inform us of planned absences and holidays, no matter the potential outcome. In the past, we have had incidents of parents not being honest with us, which leads to difficult conversations. All situations like this can lead to not only a fine, but also to families and students having to lie to the school about their whereabouts. Clearly, we would rather this not happen as it is not a pleasant experience for anyone.



## **Home Visits**

Home visits are when members of staff will attend a home to check on the wellbeing of a student. We rarely conduct home visits but will do for one of the following reasons:

1. If we believe a child is in danger.
2. Parents have not made contact for the absence of a student two days in a row.
3. If a student is refusing to come into school.
4. If attendance is poor and students are not attending.

During a home visit, someone from the school will attempt to make contact to inform parents that this is happening. Staff conducting the home visit will attend in pairs. You do not have to invite us in, however, parents usually do and appreciate the support.

## **Punctuality**

Punctuality is a key life skill for students that translates into the working world and we strive to ensure students are in good habits from a young age. We expect students to attend school on time, every day. Form Time begins at **8:45am**, students should be in their form rooms by this time. Students who arrive at the school gate after 8.45am will be marked down as late.

### **Genuine issues**

Uxbridge Road can be busy in the morning due to close proximity to the A40 the A406, so we understand that traffic can be bad at times. We also understand that “life happens” and unavoidable events such as punctures, sickness etc can make people late. If there is a genuine reason for lateness parents should call or email the school, as they would do for work, to inform us of the reasons. If these reasons are persistent, you may be invited into school to discuss them, to see if we can support in some way.

### **No reason for lateness**

Any student arriving after 8:45am with no genuine reason will be marked as ‘Late’ which will be recorded on their record. Students in Years 7 - 11 who accumulate two or more lates over a five-day week to either tutor time will have a one-hour detention. Failure to attend this will result in further consequences and more time with their Alliance Director.

### **Prosecution for persistent lateness**

If a student is persistently late for no reason, then parents are liable to be prosecuted in the same way prosecution happens for poor attendance. Parents of students who are persistently late will receive an initial warning letter stating that punctuality needs to improve or we will start the process of not authorising late marks and this could lead to a potential prosecution. Subsequently, if punctuality still does not improve, this will result in prosecution in the way of a fine from the London Borough of Hillingdon.

## **Concerns and Support**

The key to a successful relationship with us is communication.

- Communicating when your son/daughter is off school, every day.
- Communicating if your son/daughter has prolonged medical issues (with evidence).
- Communicating if there are on-going issues which could stop your son/daughter attending.
- Communicating if there are genuine reasons why your son/daughter may be late.

## **Frequently Asked Questions/Concerns**

**Parent:** *I have received a letter and I do not like the tone.*

**School:** *We are sorry you feel this way, however, we have to state certain phrases in our letters and make things really clear to leave no ambiguity. If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to discuss this with the Pastoral Leader.*

**Parent:** *I have received a letter, but my son/daughter has just been unlucky with sickness this year.*

**School:** *This is understandable; bugs can be passed easily. However, we still have to address this with parents, most meetings and calls are supportive. Some parents do not know how many days their son/daughter has had off school. These discussions provide some focus and will remind families of attendance when students are sick in the future.*

**Parent:** *We have had to move our family holiday as our son/daughter is having an emergency operation, but the letter states we could get a fine. This does not seem fair.* **School:** *We can see why you feel this way and we are sorry your son/daughter is having this operation. However, family holidays are not exceptional, they can be rearranged for a different time of the year during a different school holiday. The operation is an exceptional circumstance that we can authorise absence for, however the family holiday is not.*

**Parent:** *I was abroad during half term and could not fly back for a further week as I was ill, I emailed but you have sent a letter saying I will be fined, why is this?*

**School:** *We require evidence to support your email, this is crucial to approving the absence. This could be a discharge form from the hospital or doctor or medicine you were taking with a date on it.*

**Parent:** *My son/daughter is anxious and her attendance has dropped, but you will want to meet me to discuss this matter. You know why she can't attend, what is the point of this meeting?*

**School:** *Anxiety, along with any other prolonged absence requires medical evidence, explaining why he/she cannot attend school. Please see the section on Social, Emotional Mental Health and attendance section of this booklet for more guidance.*

**Parent:** *My son/daughter has the same sickness issue that he/she had the day before, do I need to call in again?*

**School:** *Yes, absolutely. You need to contact the school every day your son/daughter is off sick. The only exception to this is if we are aware of the absence beforehand for example a pre-arranged operation.*

**Parent:** *It says that after 3 days of sickness you require medical evidence. Doctors' appointments are hard to come by, is evidence necessary?*

**School:** *Yes, it is. A student being sick for 3 days or more should be attended to by a Doctor. Remember, you do not need a Doctor's note, a prescription with a date on during the absence is sufficient.*

**Appendix 1:** This simple diagram outlines the number of days off a student will have if attendance declines. Less than 90% attendance is 20 days or more absent, which equals 4 weeks or more of school, which is over a 120 hours of lost learning!




Getting your child into school really matters. Did you know....

If your child's attendance during the school year is	Your child would have lost approximately	They would have missed
<b>96%</b>	<b>8 days</b>	<b>48 lessons</b>
<b>90%</b>	<b>19 days</b>	<b>114 lessons</b>
<b>85%</b>	<b>29 days</b>	<b>174 lessons</b>
<b>80%</b>	<b>38 days</b>	<b>228 lessons</b>
<b>75%</b>	<b>48 days</b>	<b>288 lessons</b>
<b>70%</b>	<b>57 days</b>	<b>342 lessons</b>

You should not take your child on holiday during term time. Please encourage excellent attendance and punctuality.

**ATTENDANCE MATTERS: EVERYDAY COUNTS**

**Appendix 2:** This document outlines common illnesses children can suffer from. This is good guidance as to whether or not children should attend school.



What it's called	What it's like	Going to school	Getting treatment	More advice
Chicken Pox	Rash begins as small, red, flat spots that develop into itchy fluid-filled blisters	Yellow dot	Pharmacy	Back to school 5 days after on-set of the rash
Common Cold	Runny nose, sneezing, sore throat	Green dot	Pharmacy	Ensure good hand hygiene
Conjunctivitis	Teary, red, itchy, painful eye(s)	Green dot	Pharmacy	Try not to touch eye to avoid spreading
Flu	Fever, cough, sneezing, runny nose, headache body aches and pain, exhaustion, sore throat	Yellow dot	Pharmacy	Ensure good hand hygiene
German measles	Fever, tiredness. Raised, red, rash that starts on the face and spreads downwards.	Red dot	G.P.	Back to school 6 days from on-set of rash
Glandular fever	high temperature, sore throat; usually more painful than any before and swollen glands	Green dot	G.P.	Child needs to be physically able to concentrate
Hand, foot & mouth disease	Fever, sore throat, headache, small painful blisters inside the mouth on tongue and gums (may appear on hands and feet)	Green dot	G.P.	Only need to stay off ill feeling too ill for school
Head lice	Itchy scalp (may be worse at night)	Green dot	Pharmacy	
Impetigo	Clusters of red bumps or blisters surrounded by area of redness	Red dot	G.P.	Back to school when lesions crust or 48 hours after start of antibiotics
Measles	Fever, cough, runny nose, and watery inflamed eyes. Small red spots with white or bluish white centres in the mouth, red, blotchy rash	Red dot	G.P.	Back to school 4 days from on-set of rash
Ringworm	Red ring shaped rash, may be itchy rash may be dry and scaly or wet and crusty	Green dot	G.P.	
Scabies	Intense itching, pimple – like rash Itching and rash may be all over the body but commonly between the fingers, wrists, elbows, arm	Green dot	G.P.	Back to school after first treatment
Shingles	Pain, itching, or tingling along the affected nerve pathway. Blister-type rash	Yellow dot	G.P.	Only stay off school if rash is weeping and cannot be covered
Sickness bug/ diarrhoea	Stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea	Yellow dot	Pharmacy	See GP if symptoms persist after 48 hours
Threadworms	Intense itchiness around anus	Green dot	Pharmacy	Ensure good hand hygiene

### **Appendix 3**

Attendance - explanation for students

*96 – 100%: Continue to model the highest standards of attendance to your peers. Encourage others in your tutor group to attend well.*

*93 – 95%: Avoid any absence other than serious illness; work harder at being in school every day. Work towards becoming a Hewens College High Attendance Ambassador*

*90 - 93%: Ensure you take immediate action to improve your attendance as you will not be making as much progress as you should. Reduce the number of days you are ill by not being off unless you are physically sick. Headaches, stomach-aches, coughs and colds are not reasons to take time off school. If you take time off, come back as soon as you are up and about.*

*<90%: Urgently improve your attendance as you will not be making progress and your achievement is suffering. Don't take time off for minor illnesses such as sore throats, coughs, colds or when on antibiotics. Make sure your parent/carer contacts the school whenever you are absent. If your attendance does not improve your parents/carers may be fined for not helping you to attend school*