



Beths Grammar School

Attendance Policy

This policy sets out the rationale, our aims and the strategies that will be used to ensure that all students achieve maximum attendance.

School attendance is subject to various education laws and this school attendance policy is written to reflect these laws and the guidance produced by the Department for Education and London Borough of Bexley.

It is the duty of parents/carers to ensure that their child attends school regularly (Education Act 1996 Section 7) with consideration of legal action against parents and carers who fail in this regard. It is the responsibility of the school to actively insist on student attendance and put in place robust processes to tackle unjustified absence and truancy. The Education Welfare Service will provide support and guidance to both students, parents/carers and schools in facilitating optimum student attendance and punctuality. Local authorities have legal powers to use parenting contracts, parenting orders, penalty notices and legal proceedings to tackle unjustified absence and truancy.

A parent means:

- All natural parents, whether they are married or not.
- Any person who has parental responsibility for a child or young person.
- Any person who has care of a child or young person i.e. lives with and looks after the child.
- High levels of attendance and punctuality are expected from all our students and is included in our school's Home School Agreement, which parents must sign following their child's admission to the school (see Behaviour, Rewards and Support policy).

Department for Education guidance School attendance (2014)

Schools should:

- Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence
- Ensure every child has access to full-time education
- Act early to address patterns of absence.

Parents must perform their legal duty by ensuring children of compulsory school age who are registered to a school attend regularly.

All students must be punctual to their lessons.

There are key policies that are relevant to student attendance, registration procedures, and following up on student absence which, for your convenience, are listed below:

- admissions
- anti-bullying
- child protection and safeguarding
- exclusion

- safeguarding
- special educational needs
- teaching and learning
- behaviour and rewards.

Section 1: Rationale/Aims

For a child to reach their full educational achievement a high level of school attendance is essential.

We are committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all our students and endeavour to provide an environment where all students feel valued and welcome. Parents and students play a part in making our school so successful. Every child has a right to access the education to which he/she is entitled. Parents and teachers share the responsibility for supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and punctuality for all.

It is our duty to consistently strive to achieve a goal of 100% attendance for all children. Every opportunity will be used to convey to students and their parents or carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

For our children to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered it is vital your child is at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. The routines children develop around attendance and punctuality at school are the same as the expectations of any future employer in the world of work. High attainment, confidence with peers and staff, and future aspirations depend on good attendance.

1.1 Excellent attendance is important because:

- Statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and absence below 95%
- High attenders make better progress, both socially and academically
- High attenders find school routines, school work and friendships easier to cope with
- High attenders find learning more satisfying
- High attenders are more successful in transferring onto university and good career paths
- 100% attendance will give your child an advantage in gaining the top grades.

1.2 Aims

Every student is expected to attend every lesson of each school day.

The School encourages a climate where high attendance is the 'norm' and will expect our students to achieve a minimum of 97.5% attendance though all should aim for 100%.

Students must be made aware of the vital connection between attendance and achievement. All staff and particularly Form Tutors, Heads of Year and the Leadership Team have a crucial role to play in this process. Equally, parents and carers make a critical contribution to the success of their child and therefore the School expects them to encourage good levels of attendance and be aware of their legal responsibilities.

Section 2: Operating the policy

Beths Grammar School is required to:

- Register student's attendance twice daily, once at the start of the morning session and again during the afternoon session

- Record whether every student is present, attending an approved educational activity, absent or unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances
- Inform the Local Authority if any student fails to attend school regularly or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of 10 days or more.

2.1 Promoting good attendance

The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child. The Home School Agreement will contain details of how we will work with parents and our expectations of what parents will need to do to ensure their child achieves good attendance.

To help us all to focus on this we will:

- provide information on all matters related to attendance in our regular home school bulletin/newsletter/website
- report to you on how your child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainments
- celebrate good attendance both within forms and during year assemblies
- reward 100% attendance at the end of the academic year.

2.2 Roles and Responsibilities

2.2a Responsibilities of the school's staff

The School **cannot** authorise any leave of absence in term-time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Only the Headteacher can authorise absence and determine the number of school days that a child can be away from school, if granted. It is for the Headteacher to decide what constitutes an 'exceptional circumstance'. Leave of absence that is taken and not authorised by the Headteacher may result in the issue of a Penalty Notice (i.e. fine of £60) per parent/carer per student on the students' return to school.

A member of the Senior Leadership Team will oversee, direct and co-ordinate the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and will ensure the attendance policy is consistently applied throughout the school. This person will also ensure that attendance is both recorded accurately and analysed. He will ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties.

The Head of Individual Education Needs meets with the school's Attendance Officer on a daily basis and is informed of any specific concerns. They either meet with the Local Authority's designated Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) on a monthly basis, or before if an urgent matter arises. These meetings discuss every year group to identify individuals with attendance of note and what should be done accordingly.

If absence is frequent or continuous, except where a child is clearly unwell, staff will discuss with parents/carers the need and reasons for their child's absence and will encourage them to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a student's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence will always rest with the school.

2.2b Responsibilities of Form Tutors classroom staff

- Ensure that all students are registered accurately.
- Promote and reward good attendance with students' at all appropriate opportunities.
- Liaise with the attendance Officer on matters of attendance and punctuality.
- Communicate any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a child's absence.
- Support students with absence to engage with their learning once they are back in school.

2.2c Responsibilities of Students

- Attend every day unless they are ill or have an authorised absence.
- Arrive in school on time.
- Go to all their registrations and lessons on time.
- Take responsibility for registering at the reception desk if they are late or are leaving the school site during school hours.
- Attend a detention if they pass the threshold for being consistently late for school.

2.2d Responsibilities of parents/carers

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carer's legal responsibility (Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act) and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

Parents will:

- Inform the school on the first day of absence, and as early as possible, via either the school's attendance voice mail or e-mail
- Discuss with the tutor/class teacher any planned absences well in advance preferably via a written letter
- Support the school with their child in aiming for 100% attendance each year
- Make sure that any absence is clearly accounted for by telephone or text on the first and subsequent days of absence, or by letter, if a phone is unavailable
- Avoid taking their child out of school for non-urgent medical or dental appointments
- The student is expected to attend the school either side of the appointment in order to minimise absence from lessons
- Only request leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance
- Medical evidence should be provided if the absence is for 5 days or longer. Medical evidence may be requested if there are regular absences from school due to illness.

Section 3: Beths will ensure that:

3.1 Recording Attendance

Legally the register must be marked twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day, 8.45am, and again for the afternoon session at 1.50pm.

3.2 Lateness/Punctuality

- It is important to be on time at the start of the morning and afternoon school sessions and to lessons. The start of school/lessons is used to give out instructions or organise work. If your child is late they can miss work time with their class teacher missing vital information, cause disruption to the lesson for others, and it can be embarrassing leading to possible further absence.
- The school day begins at 8.45 and all students are expected to be in school at this time.
- Morning registration is at 8.45 am and it closes at 8.50.
- All lateness is recorded daily. This information will be required by the Courts, should a prosecution for non-attendance or lateness be necessary.
- Arrival after the close of registration will be marked as an L if the lateness is reasonable and doesn't affect the student's learning to a great extent. The register will be marked with an unauthorised absence and coded U if the student arrives in school after a greater period of time without adequate explanation. This mark shows them to be on site, but is legally recorded as an absence.

- If a student is late due to a medical appointment, they will receive an authorised absence, coded M. Please be advised that, where possible, doctors and dentists appointments are to be made outside of school hours or during school holidays.
- The school's Data Manager produces a list of students that require after school detentions which are served on Friday night with their Head of Year (HOY) and varies in length dependent upon the number of lates accrued and number of previous detentions served.
- Students who are consistently late are disrupting not only their own education but also that of the other students. Ongoing and repeated lateness is considered as unauthorised absence and will be subject to legal action (see Section 6 for further detail).
- Parents or carers of students who have patterns of lateness will be contacted to discuss the importance of good time keeping and how this might be achieved. If lateness persists parents or carers will be invited to attend the school and discuss the problem and support offered. If support is not appropriate or is declined and a child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence due to lateness recorded in any 10 week period, the school or London Borough of Bexley will be required to issue parents with a Penalty Notice in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct: issuing Penalty Notices for unauthorised absence from schools.

3.3 What to do if my child is absent?

First day of absence

- A child not attending school is considered a **safeguarding** matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required.
- *If your child is absent you must:*
 - Contact us as soon as possible on the first day of absence
 - Send a note in, or email the main reception, on the first day they return with an explanation of the absence – you must do this even if you have already telephoned us
 - Or you can call into school and report to reception.
- *If your child is absent we will:*
 - Telephone or text you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you – this is because we have a duty to ensure your child's safety as well as their regular school attendance
 - Invite you in to discuss the situation with our Attendance Officer and/or pastoral leaders and Head of Key Stage, if absences persist
 - Refer the matter to the London Borough of Bexley's Attendance Legal Panels, if absence is unauthorised and falls below 90%.

Third day absence

Please note: If your child is not seen and contact has not been established with any of the named parents/carers, after three days of absence the school is required to start child missing in education procedures as set down by Council guidance. We will make all reasonable enquiries to establish contact with parents/carers and the child, including making enquiries to known friends and/or the wider family.

Ten days' absence

We have a legal duty to report the absence of any student who is absent without an explanation for 10 consecutive days. If the child is not seen and contact has not been established with the named parent/carer then the local authority is notified that the child is at risk of being classed as missing. Children's Services staff will visit the last known address and alert key services to locate the child. Please help us to help you and your child by making sure we always have an up-to-date contact number. There will be regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

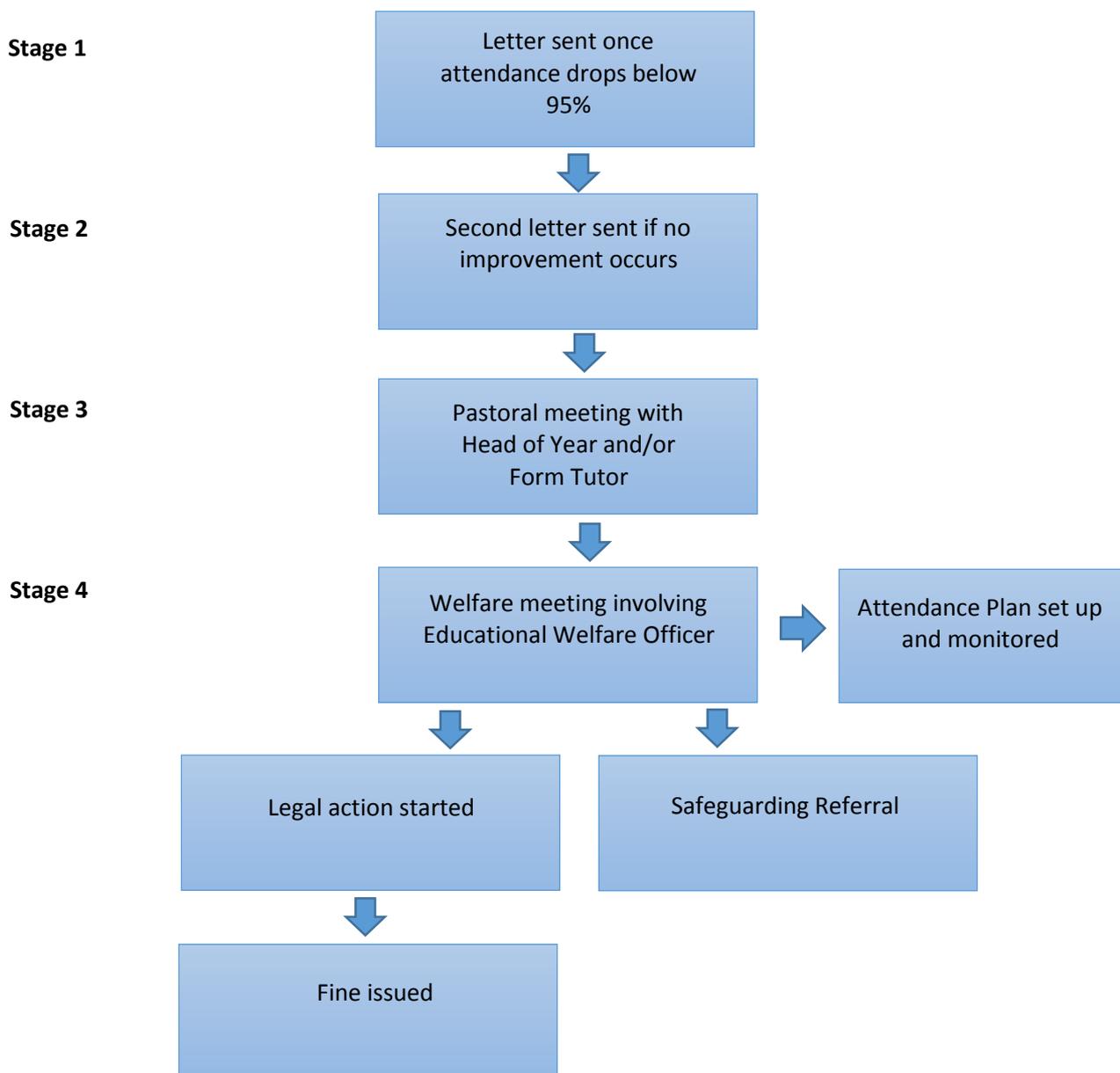
Continued or ongoing absence

If your child misses 10% (three weeks/sessions) or more schooling across the school year, for whatever reason, they are defined as persistent absentees. Absence for whatever reason disadvantages a child by

creating gaps in his or her learning. Research shows these gaps affect attainment when attendance falls below 95%. As such, we monitor all absence thoroughly and all attendance data is shared with the local authority and the Department for Education. If your child has had absence and their attendance level is falling towards 90%, we will contact you and, depending on the reasons for the absence, will move to stage 3 or 4 of the process to support excellent attendance (see next page).

All our persistent absentee students and their parents are subject to an Attendance Plan.

Process to support excellent attendance



3.4 Punctuality

Punctuality is as important as good levels of attendance in that students who are persistently late miss out on form group activities, key information and assemblies which are an important part of social development and celebrating success.

Lateness also means that students do not get the opportunity to bond with their peers and form friendships. Students miss important messages and information that are a key part of their day to day organisation and success in the school.

Persistent lateness after registration has closed constitutes the same offence for parent/carers as non-attendance and will therefore be dealt with in the same way by the Senior Leadership Team, Heads of Year and Form Tutors.

Section 4: Request for leave of absence

Amendments to school attendance regulations were updated and enforced from September 2013: The Education (Student Registration) (England) Regulations state that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. It is important to note that Headteachers can determine the length of the authorised absence, as well as whether absence is authorised at all. The fundamental principles for defining exceptional are rare, significant, or unavoidable, which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. There are no rules on this as circumstances vary from school to school and family to family.

There is, however, no legal entitlement for time off during the school term to go on holiday and, in the majority of cases, holiday will not be authorised. Parents/carers wishing to apply for leave of absence should write to the school; addressed for the attention of the Headteacher, in advance and before making any travel arrangements.

If leave is taken without prior permission from the school during term time, the absence will be unauthorised and, if the number of sessions absent hits the thresholds set down in the London Borough of Bexley's Code of Conduct, parents/carers will be issued with a fixed-penalty fine or other legal action in accordance with the code.

Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking children out during school time.

Section 5: Understanding types of absence

Students are expected to attend school every day for the entire duration of the academic year, unless there is an exceptional reason for the absence. There are two main categories of absences:

5.1 Authorised absence

This is when the school has accepted the explanation offered as satisfactory justification for the absence or given approval in advance for such an absence. If no explanation is received, absences cannot be authorised. This includes:

- Genuine sickness or illness
- Unavoidable medical/dental appointments
- Days of religious observance
- Exceptional family circumstances
- Formal exclusion from school.

5.2 Unauthorised absence

This is when the school has not received a reason for absence or has not approved a child's leave for absence from school after a parent's request. This includes:

- Parents giving their children permission to be off school unnecessarily
- Truancy before or during the school day

- Absences which have not been explained
- Any work undertaken during school hours
- Family holidays during term time (unless agreed by the Headteacher, following an application procedure)
- Interview/meeting for a Sixth Form place at another educational establishment – please note that it is unlawful for a school to conduct an interview as part of their admissions arrangements for Sixth Form and is in breach of the Admissions Code to which all schools must adhere
- Part-time work
- Leisure activities
- Birthdays or similar celebrations
- Babysitting younger siblings
- Shopping
- Driving lessons
- Family weddings.

A school can, if needed, change an authorised absence to an unauthorised absence and vice versa if new information is presented. Any changes will be communicated to parents/carers. An example of this would be where a parent states a child is unwell but on return to school there is evidence they have been on holiday.

Section 6: Penalty Notices for non-attendance and other legal measures

6.1 What is a Penalty Notice?

In education law, parents/carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular attendance of their child of compulsory school age at the school at which the child is registered, unless the absence has been authorised by the school.

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

Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 introduced additional powers under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 authorising Local Authorities and Schools 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 Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003) introduced penalty notices as an alternative to prosecution under section 444(1). Parent/carers 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.

6.2 When will a Penalty Notice be issued?

There are two offences relating to parents and carers responsibility for ensuring regular attendance at the school: if a registered student is absent without authorisation from the school or alternative provision then the parent/carer is guilty of an offence under section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996; if the parent/carer knows that the child is failing to attend regularly at the school and fails to cause them to do so, he/she is guilty of an offence under section 444 (1A) of the Education Act 1996.

The school considers that regular attendance at school is of such importance that Penalty Notices may be used in a range of situations where unauthorised absence occurs:

- Overt truancy (including students found during truancy sweeps)

- Inappropriate parentally-condoned absence
- Holidays in term time or excessive delayed return from an extended holiday without prior school permission
- Persistent late arrival at school (after the Register has closed).

The school never takes such action lightly and would prefer to work with parents/carers to reduce unjustified absence without having to resort to any enforcement actions. School attendance is of such importance to us that the school **will** use the powers if this is the only way of securing a child's schooling.

There is no set number of times a formal warning of possible Penalty Notice issue may be made in any particular case.

A parent/carer will be issued with a formal written warning that their child has unauthorised absences and that they have become liable for the issue of a Penalty Notice.

There is no statutory right of appeal against the issuing of a Penalty Notice.

6.3 Legal measures for tackling persistent absence or lateness

Bexley schools and the London Borough of Bexley will use the full range of legal measures to secure good attendance. Legal measures will only be considered when there is unauthorised absence and:

- The child or family do not require the support from any agency to improve the attendance
- The child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence and parents are complicit in the child's absence.

The following legal measures will be used for students of compulsory school age who are registered at a school:

- Parenting contracts set at Education Planning Meetings
- Parenting orders
- Penalty Notices
- Education Supervision Orders
- Prosecution.

Where a child has unauthorised absence the school must enforce the London Borough of Bexley's Code of Conduct: issuing Penalty Notices for unauthorised absence from schools or follow its guidance on other legal measures for non-attendance. The Code of Conduct is a statutory document that ensures that powers for legal sanctions are applied consistently and fairly across all schools and their families within the authority.

The Code of Conduct states that schools or the London Borough of Bexley will issue a Penalty Notice for any unauthorised absence where the student has been:

- Absent for 10 or more half-day sessions (five school days) of unauthorised absence during any 100 possible school sessions – these do not need to be consecutive
- Persistently late (coded U) for up to 10 sessions (five days) after the register has closed
- Persistently late before the close of the register (coded L), but the school has met with parents and has clearly communicated that they will categorise as unauthorised any further lateness (code U), and where the threshold of 10 sessions (five days) has been met
- Absent for any public examinations of which dates are published in advance
- Absent for any formal school assessments, tests or examinations where the dates have been published in advance
- Unless the issuing of a Penalty Notice would conflict with other intervention strategies in place or other sanctions already being processed.

If a child's unauthorised absence meets any of the above criteria and the family or child do not require any agency support to improve the attendance, then a Penalty Notice is issued for either:

- 10 sessions of unauthorised absence or lateness in any 10 week school period
- One or more sessions of unauthorised absence during a public exam, formal school assessment or testing where dates are published in advance.

This includes where a student has unauthorised absence due to either:

- Non-approval of a parent/carer's request for leave of absence, or
- A holiday that has been taken without permission.

Parents and carers will be warned of the likelihood of a Penalty Notice being issued for unauthorised absence via a letter, through the leave of absence request form, or through the school's attendance policy and website. The Penalty Notice is a fine that is issued to each parent/carer who condoned (or was responsible for the child) during the period of unauthorised absence for which the fine has been issued. For each case of unauthorised absence the school or Council will decide whether a Penalty Notice is issued to one or more parents/carers for each child. NB: This could mean four Penalty Notices for a family with two siblings, both with unauthorised absence for holiday, i.e. one Penalty Notice for each child to each parent.

Each Penalty Notice carries a fine of £60 if paid within 21 days of the Penalty Notice being posted. If the fine is not paid within 21 days the penalty is automatically increased to £120 if paid within 28 days. If the fine remains unpaid the Council will consider prosecution for the non-attendance. Payment methods are detailed on the Penalty Notices themselves. Penalties are to be paid to LBB and revenue resulting from payment of penalties is used by the Council to help cover the costs of issuing Penalty Notices and/or the cost of prosecuting recipients who do not pay.

Please note: If you pay the Penalty Notice and your child has further unauthorised absences, additional legal action will be taken. For example, in the event that a Penalty Notice has previously been served to you due to unauthorised holiday, should your child have any future unauthorised leave this will result in further legal action for you, such as prosecution or an Education Supervision Order.

Section 7: Other recommended policy sections

7.1 My child is trying to avoid coming to school. What should I do?

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents/carers and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend, it is never better to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and may make things worse.

Contact your child's Form Tutor/Head of Year immediately and openly discuss your worries. Your child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with school work, bullying, friendship problems, family difficulties, etc. It is important that we identify the reason for your child's reluctance to attend school and work together to tackle the problem. In some cases, you may find it helpful to discuss the circumstances of your child's difficulties with another professional.

7.2 What can I do to encourage my child to attend school?

Make sure your child has enough sleep and gets up in plenty of time each morning. Ensure that he/she leaves home in the correct clothes and is properly equipped. Show your child, by your interest, that you value his/her education. Please ensure you can track his/her academic activities, rewards and behaviour by accessing the following:

- www.showmyhomework

- School Gateway App – allows you to see commendations and behaviour issues.

Also please ensure that online activity through the night or addiction to online gaming is not preventing your child from sleeping and hence getting up to go to school. Our advice to all parents is to:

- Ensure that phones are charged up over night outside of the bedroom
- House internet is disconnected after a set time each night
- Seek advice and help if you think your child is suffering from gaming addiction.

7.3 Leavers

If your child is leaving Beths before the end of Year 13 parents are asked to:

- Give the Attendance Officer comprehensive information about their plans, including any date of a move and your new address and telephone numbers, your child's new school and the start date, when known. This should be submitted to Beths Grammar in writing
- If students leave and we do not have the above information, then your child is considered to be a child missing in education. This requires schools and local authorities to then carry out investigations to try and locate your child, which includes liaising with Children's Services, the Police and other agencies. By giving us the above information, these investigations can be avoided.

7.4 Absence through child participation in public performances, including theatre, film or television work and modelling

The regulations related to children participating in public performances are separate to those around authorising leave of absence.

Parents of a child performer can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in a performance. They must contact the Headteacher to discuss the nature and frequency of the work, whether the child has a valid performance licence and whether education will be provided by the employer during any future leave of absence. It is, however, down to the Headteacher's discretion as to whether to authorise this. Any absence recorded as part of a child's participation in a public performance is recorded as C, an authorised absence.

For national advice see: www.gov.uk/child-performance-licence-england-scotland-wales.

7.5 Absence through competing at regional, county or national level for sport

Parents of able sportsmen and women can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in regional, county, national and international events and competitions. It is, however, down to the Headteacher's discretion as to whether to authorise this and they will wish to discuss with you the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning will continue if absence occurs. Permission for your child to leave early or arrive late to attend coaching and training sessions is also at the discretion of the Headteacher and is not likely to be approved if it is a regular event, unless the sports club or association is providing an education tutor as part of their coaching.

Section 8: Reporting and Tracking

The school produces regular attendance reports which it uses to promote excellent attendance and punctuality. Three times a year a report is also provided to the governors' student committee.

Section 9: Record preservation

School registers are legal documents.

We will ensure compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for at least three years.

Reviewed Autumn 2019
Next Scheduled Review Date: Autumn 2022