Student Attendance
and Punctuality Policy,
Procedures and
Guidance

2014-15
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Student Attendance and Punctuality

Policy Statement

MidKent College is committed to providing high quality education and training and to student success. To achieve this we must maximise students’ learning opportunities by;

- Setting high expectations for attendance and punctuality at all timetabled sessions
- Working in partnership with students and, where applicable, their parents and employers, to ensure good attendance and punctuality, embedding a culture of reliability and commitment
- Monitoring and taking action to improve attendance and punctuality where necessary.

Policy Validity

This policy is valid for the academic year 2014-15 and is due for review in July 2015.

Summary of College Expectations of Punctuality and Attendance

1. The College expects 100% attendance and punctuality at all timetabled sessions. This includes workshops, compulsory visits and activities, tutorials etc.

2. Attendance of all students will be reviewed after the first five weeks of the academic year. Any student who has not achieved at least 90% attendance, and who is unable to provide a full justification, will be withdrawn from the College.

3. Attendance will be regularly monitored throughout students’ time at College. Failure to maintain good attendance will be dealt with through the College disciplinary procedure.

4. Students are expected to give a good reason, backed up with evidence, for all absences.

5. Students are expected to provide a reasonable justification for any lateness. Teaching staff have the right to refuse admission to the class to late students. The rules that apply to different areas of the College on lateness will be given to students during induction.

6. Where absences/lateness can be foreseen in advance, the student should notify the College via the designated person or the Report an Absence button on their ePLP. Appropriate evidence should be provided to the designated person for the absence to be classed as authorised.

7. For unforeseen absences, such as illness, the student must make contact with the College to notify the designated person of their absence as early as possible on the first day of absence and every subsequent day unless they are signed off by a doctor for a given period. Contact should be made either by notifying the designated person or via the Report an Absence button on their ePLP.

8. Upon return to College after an absence, students must provide evidence of the reason for their absence before authorised absence can be noted in registers.

9. Non-attendance may be dealt with as part of the College’s disciplinary procedure and may result in a final written warning or expulsion.
Implementing the Policy - Staff Procedures and Guidance

1. This document can only cover the most common situations that will occur. Therefore when the procedures and guidance do not appear to cover a given situation, staff should either use their own judgement to resolve the matter, or consult with their line manager. Any feedback on the suitability of the policy and guidance should be made to the Quality Department. Please note that any reference to registers in this policy relates to the electronic register.

2. In order for the College to monitor and improve attendance and punctuality it is essential that all registers are marked in an accurate and timely fashion. The staff member responsible for the session must complete the register marking as soon as possible and in all cases by midday on the day after which the session falls. Failure to do this may result in students missing out on payments from Student Financial Support e.g. Guaranteed Bursary, Buss Passes etc., and in significant inconvenience and distress.

3. Registers are auditable documents and must be maintained in a timely and accurate fashion. Where it is identified that a member of staff persistently fails to mark a register, or marks registers late, they may be subject to disciplinary action. Where registers remain outstanding after 28 days the presumption will be for disciplinary action. In the event of a staff member being off sick the Head of Faculty is responsible for arranging cover and ensuring that the register is completed.

4. Students are normally expected to make medical and other appointments outside of timetabled hours. However, where a student knows in advance that they are unable to attend a lesson, they must report the absence via their ePLP, and provide evidence of the absence to the nominated person in advance, so that the absence can be noted as ‘authorised’ in the register. When authorising absences the nominated member of staff will need to consider;

   - Whether the case is reasonable
   - The number of absences taken by the individual
   - Repetitions of the same justification
   - Whether the justification is backed up by evidence

Examples of legitimate reasons for absence might include;

   - Medical appointments which cannot be made outside of timetabled hours
   - Religious holiday
   - Attendance at a funeral
   - Severe disruption to the transport network
   - Driving test
   - Student representatives’ meetings
   - Responsibilities for caring for a close family member. If this is likely to affect their learning, this should be explored with the student and support offered.

An absence will not be authorised for any of the following reasons;

   - Holidays
   - Babysitting
   - Driving lessons
• Birthdays
• Leisure activities
• Shopping
• Full or Part-time work (other than work experience).

5. If the nominated member of staff judges the absence to be legitimate they should change the absent mark to authorised absence in the register.

6. When the absence cannot be foreseen, the student should advise the College through the School’s normal procedure, either by telephone or email to a nominated person (usually the Divisional Secretary/Administrator, depending on local arrangements) or via the Report an Absence button on the ePLP, by 8:45am on the day of absence. The teacher responsible for the register will mark the student ‘absent’.

7. Where no justification for the absence is provided in advance, the member of staff nominated to follow up absences must contact the student, and in the case of 16-19 year olds their parent, guardian or employer to ascertain the reason for the absence as soon as practicable. Where possible the student should be asked to attend unless there is a valid reason for non-attendance. The member of staff should record any contact made, discussions, reasons and information and ensure this is communicated to other staff as required, using the absence management tool.

8. On the first day back at College, the student is required to provide evidence to support the absence, to the nominated person. Evidence for the absence may be in the form of a note from a parent, carer or guardian (for students under 18), or a medical certificate in the case of absences of 5 or more days.

9. When the member of staff who marked the student absent next sees the student, they should ask for an explanation for the absence, draw the student’s attention to the attendance policy and stress that non-attendance will be followed up and dealt with.

10. Should a pattern of non-attendance emerge, the curriculum tutor should follow this up at the earliest opportunity with the student, recording any information on the student’s e-PLP. The students Personal Tutor must be advised.

11. If the level of non-attendance is judged to be unacceptable then the College disciplinary procedure should be used to deal with the matter. As the policy states that we expect 100% attendance, anything below this, unless by prior agreement or with valid reason, is unacceptable. It would therefore be appropriate to use the disciplinary procedure as soon as problems become apparent, rather than leave the problems to grow without formally tackling them.
Staff Responsibilities

All staff are responsible for ensuring the good attendance and punctuality of their students and for dealing with attendance and punctuality issues whenever they occur. There are some specific responsibilities attached to staff; these are outlined below:

The Lecturers/Instructors/Trainers or those taking class registers are responsible for:

1. Accurately completing the register on the day of attendance (and no later than midday on the day following the session)
2. Noting in the register any absences and lateness
3. Following up absence with the student when they next meet
4. Reporting any persistent issues with students to the Teaching and Learning Manager (TLM) or Head of Faculty (HoF)
5. Promoting good punctuality and attendance through their own behaviour and teaching standards.

The Head of Faculty is responsible for:

1. Nominating a member of staff in their Faculty at each centre who will carry out the immediate follow-up to an absence and recording of reasons for absences and lateness
2. Monitoring attendance and punctuality issues at team meetings and taking early action to resolve issues
3. Ensuring that registers are marked accurately and in a timely fashion and following up on any unmarked registers with individuals in their team
4. Ensuring that, in the event of a staff member being absent, the register is taken or reallocated on the timetable in instances of long term absence
5. Ensuring major changes to timetables are communicated to MIS

The Nominated Member of Staff is responsible for:

1. Making initial contact with an absent student, and in the case of 16-19 year olds their parent, guardian or employer to find out the reasons for the absence.
2. Recording the results of any conversations and relaying this information to other members of the teaching team or support staff as necessary, using the absence management tool.
3. Maintaining records relating to punctuality and attendance and details of any evidence produced to support absences and lateness.
4. Ensuring minor changes to timetables are communicated to MIS

Personal/Course Tutor is responsible for:

1. Working with the curriculum team to follow up any absences and ascertain reasons
2. Working with the student to improve absence
3. Dealing with any personal/pastoral issues that affect poor attendance and punctuality
4. Liaising with parents or guardians in order to improve attendance and resolves issues
5. Updating the e-PLP or Student Support LSR
APPENDIX 1 – Student Attendance/Punctuality Guide

Information for students, parents/carers/guardians and employers

What this guide is about

This booklet is aimed at students but it is also of interest to parents/carers/guardians and employers. It will tell you about:

- Students’ responsibilities for attendance and punctuality
- How the College collects data about attendance
- The procedures that are in place to report absences and attendance
- How the College will deal with poor student attendance and punctuality.

Why good attendance and punctuality are important

MidKent College is committed to providing high quality education and training. We want to support you to achieve well in your time at College. To do this we will:

- Set high expectations for attendance and punctuality at all timetabled sessions - you are expected to have 100% attendance and always be on time.

- Work in partnership with you to make sure you attend regularly and are punctual – so that you can demonstrate to future employers, other Colleges or universities that you are reliable, committed and hard working.

- Take action to improve attendance and punctuality where necessary – this includes our right to take disciplinary action against students and even to exclude them from the College if attendance is poor.

Students’ responsibilities

You are expected to:

- Attend 100% of all scheduled classes relating to your programme of study as confirmed on your learning agreement
- Report any absence due to illness or other reason to the College by 8:45am on the first and every subsequent day of absence (by phone, e-mail or via your ePLP)
- Do everything possible to avoid necessary absences by making medical appointments outside class time unless it is an emergency
- Avoid going on holiday during term time
- Arrange appointments with careers advisors/Connexions etc. outside of lesson time
- Provide medical evidence for absences of more than 5 consecutive days
- Tell us in advance if you know you are going to miss a lesson
- On the first day back at College after an absence, present evidence to support your absence.
• Catch up with any work you have missed

How attendance is recorded at the College

A register is taken for every lesson in College including tutorials and functional skills. Tutors mark a register and the data is stored on our student information system which also sends the data to the student’s electronic Personal Learning Plan (ePLP) where it is displayed on the front page. This means we can produce records for each student from the start of their College course.

You can check your own attendance record by logging onto the ePLP.

Registers are marked as follows:

• D for disruptive
• I for Illness
• / for present
• O for absent
• L for late (after the tutor has begun the lesson)
• Z for a session that has not been held (for example if the College closed due to a power failure)
• A for an authorised absence
• E for course visit

NB – Attendance of all students will be reviewed after the first five weeks of the academic year. If at that time you have not achieved AT LEAST 90% ATTENDANCE, and are not able to provide a full justification, you will be withdrawn from the College. Attendance will be regularly monitored throughout your time at MidKent College and if you fail to maintain the required level of attendance you will be dealt with through the College disciplinary procedure.

What to do about visits or open days

We will know the names of students who are going on College trips and visits. However, as a matter of courtesy, you should still inform your tutors in advance of these absences. This will make sure that these events are recorded and will not then affect your attendance record.

Reporting on your attendance

We monitor your attendance closely and your tutor will receive a summary of your attendance. Any absences and late marks will be shown and your tutor will ask you about these.

We strongly recommend that you check your own records carefully as your attendance rate will be included on all reports about your progress and in all references that are written to potential employers or to other Colleges or universities. If you have a genuine reason for a high absence rate we will comment sensitively about this in any reference. We aim to be fair to students but, in line with our values, if attendance is unsatisfactory for no good reason we will be honest about this. The College’s usual practice is to discuss references with students when they are being written.
What if your attendance is poor?

If your attendance rate is unsatisfactory you can expect this to be followed up by your tutor initially and senior staff if required, for example your Teaching and Learning Manager (TLM) and/or Head of Faculty. Parents/guardians of students aged under 18 are normally contacted if poor attendance becomes a problem. If you are being supported by your employer through your programme we may also contact them with absence reports.

If you have worries or personal problems that are affecting your attendance, please discuss these with teaching staff or your personal tutor.

Poor attendance may be dealt with as part of the College’s disciplinary procedure and may result in a final written warning or expulsion.

Frequently asked questions

1. What will be accepted as an authorised absence?

Absences will only be authorised if we know in advance there is a good reason, such as:

- Medical appointments which cannot be made outside of timetabled hours
- Religious holiday
- Attendance at a funeral
- Severe disruption to the transport network
- Driving test
- Student Reps or other College meetings that you are asked to attend
- Responsibilities for caring for a close family member (If this is likely to affect your learning please discuss this with your personal tutor)
- Participation in a significant outside activity e.g. taking part in a regional or national event
- A visit to a University either to attend an open day or for an interview
- A work experience placement where this is a requirement of the course.

2. What are not acceptable reasons for absence?

The following reasons for absence would not generally be acceptable:

- Holidays/Leisure activities
- Part time employment
- Birthdays
- Driving lessons
- Shopping.

3. What about unplanned absence?

In the case of an unplanned absence the College will take into account:

- the number of absences you have already taken
• repeated absences (especially for the same reason)
• whether you can back up the absence with some evidence
• whether we feel it is reasonable.

You must tell the College as soon as possible on the day of absence that you will be missing lessons, otherwise we will treat the absence as unauthorised (other than in cases such as an emergency situation involving a family member).

4. What do you mean by ‘evidence of absence’?

The following things can be counted as evidence for an authorised absence;

• A letter from a parent/care/guardian (students under 18 only)
• A medical appointment card
• A doctor’s certificate (in the case of absences of 5 or more days)
• Driving test notification letter.

5. What happens if it snows or if the weather is really bad?

If the weather is severe the College may shut for health and safety reasons. We will announce any closures on local radio and on the College website. You can also telephone the College for up-to-date information. In these circumstances we may issue a general authorisation of absence.