CHILDREN ABSENT FROM EDUCATION POLICY

Our Mission Statement – the reason our College exists

"Learning & Growing in the Light of the Gospel"

With Christ at the centre of our learning, we:
- *Help young people to achieve their greatest potential*
- *Guide their intellectual growth, nurture their God-given talents, and inspire them to live in service to others*
- *Aim to develop honest, confident, responsible and compassionate members of society, based on the educational values of Blessed Antonio Rosmini*

Our Vision Statement – the long-term change resulting from our work

'Begin here, go anywhere'

Ratcliffe's unique educational offering based on our College motto, "Legis Plenitudo Charitas", Love is the fulfilment of the Law, provides a perfect context within which young people may acquire the emotional knowledge and interpersonal skills necessary to live happy and purposeful lives. The College's inclusive Catholic ethos is complemented by the outstanding quality of our College community through which our Mission, "Learning and Growing in the Light of the Gospel", serves to nurture resilience and develop maturity. Young people leave Ratcliffe with a strong sense of who they are and their purpose in the world, equipped socially, emotionally, morally and spiritually to go forth and make a difference to the communities in which they live and work.

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Definition of Children Absent from Education

[Section 7 of the Education Act 1996](#) sets out that the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause them to receive efficient full-time education.

Children absent from education are children of compulsory school age[1] who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school. This includes children who are registered at a school but have prolonged or repeated periods of absence for any reason. Children absent from education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, exploitation, or radicalisation, and becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) later in life.

Effective information sharing between parents, schools and local authorities is critical to ensuring that all children of compulsory school age are safe and receiving suitable education.

Parents' Responsibilities

Parents have a duty to ensure that their children of compulsory school age are receiving suitable full-time education. Some parents may elect to educate their children at home and may withdraw them from school at any time to do so unless they are subject to a School Attendance Order.

Where a parent notifies the school in writing that they are home educating, the school must delete the child's name from the admission register and inform the local authority. However, where parents orally indicate that they intend to withdraw their child to be home educated, the school should consider notifying the local authority at the earliest opportunity.

Schools' Responsibilities

School must enter pupils on the admission register at the beginning of the first day on which the school has agreed, or been notified, that the pupil will attend the school. If a pupil fails to attend on the agreed or notified date, the school should undertake reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts and consider notifying the local authority at the earliest opportunity.

School must monitor pupils' attendance through the daily register. School should agree with their local authority the intervals at which they will inform local authorities of the

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[1] A child reaches compulsory school age on or after their fifth birthday. If they turn 5 between 1 January and 31 March, then they are of compulsory school age on 31 March; if they turn 5 between 1 April and 31 August, then they are of compulsory school age on 31 August. If they turn 5 between 1 September and 31 December, then they are of compulsory school age on 31 December. A child continues to be of compulsory school age until the last Friday of June in the school year that they reach sixteen.

details of pupils who fail to attend regularly or have missed ten school days or more without permission. School should monitor attendance closely and address poor or irregular attendance. It is important that pupil's poor attendance is referred to the local authority where the school have made all reasonable steps to address or resolve any difficulties in the student's attendance.

Where a pupil has not returned to school for ten days after an authorised absence or is absent from school without authorisation for twenty consecutive school days, the pupil can be removed from the admission register when the school and the local authority have failed, after jointly making reasonable enquiries, to establish the whereabouts of the child.

This only applies if the school does not have reasonable grounds to believe that the pupil is unable to attend because of sickness or unavoidable cause.

Schools must also arrange full-time education for excluded pupils from the sixth school day of a fixed period exclusion.

The College has appointed senior members of staff as **School Attendance Champions** to have overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance in the College. Details of the individuals appointed are in the Registration Policy.

School has a safeguarding duty in respect of their pupils, and as part of this should investigate any **unexplained** absences.

When the whereabouts of a child is unclear or unknown, it is reasonable to expect that the local authority and the school will complete and record one or more of the following actions:

 a. contact the parent, relatives and neighbours using known contact details.

 b. check local databases within the local authority.

 c. check Key to Success or school2school (s2s) systems.

 d. follow local information sharing arrangements and where possible make enquiries via other local databases and agencies e.g., those of housing providers, school admissions, health services, police, refuge, Youth Justice Services, children's social care, and HM Revenue & Customs;

 e. check with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and/or the Border Force.

 f. check with agencies known to be involved with family.

 g. check with local authority and school from which child moved originally, if known.

 h. check with any local authority and school to which a child may have moved.

 i. check with the local authority where the child lives, if different from where the school is;

 j. in the case of children of Service Personnel, check with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS); and

k. home visit(s) made by appropriate teams, following local guidance concerning risk assessment and if appropriate make enquiries with neighbour(s) and relatives.

Registration of students

Ratcliffe College has clear guidelines for the electronic registration of students twice daily. The first record is completed by the Form Tutor on the start of the school day and by staff at the beginning of period 5.

There is a signing in and out procedure for all students during the school day and for boarders at other times. Requests for planned absences are required in advance, with temporary unexpected absence explained to Form Tutors, Heads of Year, the School Secretary, or the Headmaster by a letter or e-mail from parents. When a child moves school there should be communication with the school by the parent/guardian advising school as to which education setting the child is moving to or whether there has been a decision to Home Educate. The decision to Home Educate will trigger the reporting of this to the Local Authority for their information and appropriate action.

Child absent within school

In the event of a student being absent without authorisation or explanation, but is known to be in School, the member of staff responsible for that lesson or activity should inform the School Secretary, at the earliest opportunity (staff should not, in normal circumstances, leave their lesson).

The School Secretary will check whether the student has been registered present during the school day and will also cross reference with the front office, Preparatory School Reception, Medical Centre or Sixth Form Centre to ascertain if the student has signed out.

In the event of the School Secretary being unavailable, the main School office should be contacted (Preparatory School reception if it is a Preparatory School student) and a member of the Senior Leadership Team must also be informed, normally the Deputy Head Pastoral, Senior Deputy Head or Head of Prep School. The person in charge must ascertain the circumstances of the absence and parents should be contacted. The checking should continue for no more time than is reasonably practicable before the police are informed.

Procedure during day school hours

- Other students are asked if they have any information
- Member of staff responsible contacts the School Secretary Mrs Sangita Patel (2050) or Preparatory School reception, if appropriate (2072)
- School secretary checks registers and signing in out book.

- School secretary contacts the Medical Centre to ascertain if the student is there
- School secretary contacts the tutor and Head of Year to ascertain whether they have any knowledge of the students whereabouts.
- School secretary rings home to see if the student has absented themselves without following expected procedures.
- School secretary contacts the Head of Year or Head of Preparatory School and Deputy Head, Pastoral
- Attempts should be made to contact the student on mobile phone if he/she has one.
- Head / Deputy Heads of school made aware of missing student.
- If practicable, sensible searching of the immediate area should be undertaken, following any clues or information forthcoming from any source including students.
- Head / Deputy Heads contacts parents.
- Head / Deputy Heads contacts police, giving details of where student was last seen and for how long they have been "missing". All the relevant information regarding the student must be readily available including a full description and any details of the clothing in which the student was last seen.
- Head / Deputy Head raises with DSL or DDSL
- DSL contacts School Liaison Officer
- A written record is made of any incident of a student missing from school, the action taken, and any reasons given by the student for being missing.

Boarding

- Contact Housemaster/Housemistress or member of staff in charge.
- Housemaster/Housemistress or member of staff in charge checks signing in out book.
- Housemaster/Housemistress or member of staff in charge checks weekend arrangements
- Housemaster/Housemistress or member of staff in charge asks friends if they know the whereabouts of the student.
- Housemaster/Housemistress or member of staff in charge rings student's mobile to make direct contact.
- If practicable, sensible searching of the immediate area should be undertaken, following any clues or information forthcoming from any source.
- Housemaster/Housemistress or member of staff in charge contacts Head of Boarding and/or Deputy Head Pastoral
- The Headmaster is informed by the Deputy Head Pastoral
- Housemaster/Housemistress contacts parents if possible
- Housemaster/Housemistress or member of staff in charge contacts police, giving details of where student was last seen and for how long they have been "missing". All the relevant information regarding the student must be readily available including a full description and any details of the clothing in which the student was last seen.
- Housemaster/Housemistress raises with DSL
- A written record is made of any incident of a student missing from school, the action taken, and any reasons given by the student for being missing.

Nursery

Parents of children in Cygnets and Swans (non-statutory school age) are asked to report their child's absence from Nursery. Where a child is absent and the Nursery or Prep School has not been notified, the College will ring parents to enquire about the absence on the day.

The Head of EYFS (and Attendance Champion for EYFS children) will consider patterns and trends in a child's absences and will use their professional judgement, in conjunction with the Director of Safeguarding, when deciding if the child's absence should be considered as prolonged. Where a child's absence is considered as prolonged or in circumstances where parents have not been contactable to explain absences, concerns will be referred to local children's social care services and/or a police welfare check requested.

Long Term or regular absence from school

There will be circumstances where students will be absent from education for a variety of reasons including physical illness (long or short term), mental ill health or personal family circumstances. There are many and varied reasons and each case should be dealt with individually and the circumstances established.

Initial actions

The initial course of action should be for Form Tutors to establish the reasons for the student absence particularly if these are regular or impacting on learning. This should involve communication with parents/guardians as well as the student themselves (if able) to identify what support or reasonable adjustments, if any, can be introduced to facilitate attendance. Any concerns and actions should be recorded on to the Child Protection and Online Management System under the category of 'Persistent Abscence' unless other more concerning issues are identified.

Any safeguarding concerns should be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or one of their Deputies.

The Form Tutor should seek advice from their Head of Year or other support at school as needed i.e., SENCo, Medical, Pastoral or Safeguarding.

Where the Form Tutor identifies a matter that could require more focused or coordinated support then this should be case managed by the Head of Year for that student's year group.

Head of Year Actions

In circumstances where a matter becomes more complex and involved, the Form Tutor and Head of Year should agree who the most appropriate person is to case manage the situation. If it is agreed that the Head of Year will manage the case, then they should establish and identify appropriate reasonable adjustments to try and facilitate the student's engagement back into learning.

The Head of Year can seek support from across the school in identifying the most appropriate course of action and should consider the 'Team Around the Student' approach where appropriate members of staff meet to agree on the best course of action. Consideration should be given to inviting parents/guardians and the student to Team Around the Student meetings.

Any actions and welfare plans should be recorded onto CPOMS to provide a chronology of support provided.

Continued Absence

After support and reasonable adjustments have been made and there is no discernible improvement in the student's attendance then Heads of Year should consider sending a letter to parents/guardians.

As a guide to Heads of Year, the expectation for attendance at school is 100%. Where a student's attendance reaches 95% this should trigger proactive enquiries from the Form Tutor in identifying any issues. If a student's attendance falls to 90% then this may trigger the Head of Year seeking clarity as to what the issues are and advising the parent/guardian of:

i)   the level of attendance
ii)   the expectations of the school and
iii)   what support is available.

In the Senior School, attendance is reviewed on a fortnightly basis, with students with an AM registration attendance of 80% or below in the previous fortnight highlighted. This allows Heads of Year and other key staff, such as the Deputy Head Pastoral, to evaluate if a pattern of absence is a concern. Attendance at AM registration and Lateness to AM registration is reviewed at the end of each half-term by the Deputy Head Pastoral and attendance trends are routinely reviewed by the Deputy Head Pastoral, Director of Safeguarding and the SENCO.

In the circumstances where the reason for low attendance relates to medical concerns then evidence should be sought to corroborate this from the parent/guardian. As part of this, recommendations should be sought from medical professionals as to any reasonable adjustments that could be implemented to improve attendance or engagement in learning.

UKVI Sponsored Students

UKVI sponsor guidance states that a sponsored student's attendance must not drop below 80% or miss 10 consecutive days through unauthorised absence. The attendance of UKVI sponsored students are assessed through the same process as outlined above.

If any of the above occurs the school will assess the reasons behind this and follow this policy guidance on identifying factors that are impacting on the student's attendance and implement support as appropriate. Matters which may lead to a decline in attendance may include:

- Medical Leave
- Family emergencies
- Approved academic trips

Early Identification of matters that are impacting on a student's ability to attend lessons is crucial in resolving the issues successfully. The school will adopt the Team Around the Student approach in supporting such students who will be placed onto the Student Support Services Case Management Meeting agenda for discussion at the earliest opportunity.

If necessary, the school will report non-compliance of a student visa through absence to the UKVI once all efforts have been made to identify issues and support the student and their family.

Escalation of concerns

There will be circumstances where, despite all efforts to support a student and their family, attendance continues to fall or remains below acceptable levels. Communication with families in these circumstances should also advise parents/guardians of the legal obligation of school to liaise with the Local Authority in seeking to support the student, parents, or guardians in having the student returning or engaging in learning.

In these circumstances, the matter should be raised to the Senior Leadership Team for a decision to be made around engagement with the Local Authority to seek guidance in moving forward.

The length of time invested in supporting a student back into learning, or agreeing a compromise, should not be protracted and should not extend beyond a term period. All efforts should be made to identify the issue, set in place a plan of action along with the setting of realistic timescales for expected improvements.

If there is evidence to suggest that the lack of engagement in learning is a safeguarding concern, then the matter should be escalated to the Designated Safeguarding Lead. Lack of engagement in learning or attendance does not automatically imply that there is a safeguarding concern, and consideration should be given as to whether:

a) Parent/guardian are a barrier to the student engaging in learning i.e., mental health issues, substance misuse, neglect etc.

b) There is a lack of engagement from the parent/guardian in seeking a resolution.
c) The student presents with concerning behaviour possibly related to abuse, maltreatment, substance misuse, mental ill health, or exploitation.
d) There is a contextual safeguarding concern (external influences away from the family environment)
e) Bullying is a factor.

In these circumstances the matter should be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will consider differing options including use of the 'early help' process or referral to Childrens Services dependent on the circumstances. The matter will be raised at Student Support Services meetings to identify strategies and actions appropriate to support and promote the student's attendance at school.

The 'Early Help' process should be considered:

- if a student is receiving suspensions or is being considered for permanent exclusion.
- If their absence from school is unexplainable or persistent.

Conclusion

A child absent from education is a concern and Ratcliffe college staff should attempt to quickly identify the reasoning's for a lack of attendance or engagement and implement actions or support to mitigate the impact on the child or young person.

There can be many factors to consider, and a coordinated approach should be the focus in any welfare or action plan.