



# **The Bridge School**

## **Attendance Policy**

This document was accepted and ratified on: January 2024

Review date: January 2026

Person responsible: Maria Jackson, Head of School

## **Introduction**

Student absence affects a young person's social skills, academic progress, post 16 outcomes and often a child's self-esteem, which affects their ability to become resilient adults and deal with trials and tribulations later in life. That is why The Bridge places significant importance on attendance.

However, as we accept children with mental health and medical health needs, which has previously prevented them from attending mainstream school for long a period and therefore 93+% attendance is not always achievable or realistic for some. Nevertheless, the school strives to promote and regular attendance by working closely with our young people and their families to support them to achieve good attendance and punctuality in spite of their medical health needs. In most cases, students who are referred to The Bridge have an outgoing school attendance significantly lower than the National Average for secondary schools and it can take time and significant support for students to achieve sustained improvement.

Local Authorities placing young people at The Bridge are aware that The Bridge offers full time education (or as much as the child's health condition will allow) and the placement addresses the needs of individual children in arranging provision. 'Hard and fast' rules are inappropriate: they may limit the offer of education to children with a given condition and prevent their access to the right level of educational support, which they are well enough to receive. ***DfE Ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend mainstream school because of health needs. Statutory guidance for Local Authorities January 2013***

The Bridge will ensure all students referred to the Bridge will have a bespoke integration plan to meet their individual requirements. The plan will take into account the length of time the young person has been out of education as well as their medical needs, the school will strive to ensure that their experience of attending a new school is a positive one. In all cases the school will aim to increase the student's timetable but at an acceptable pace and one, the young person can cope with so the student has every opportunity to access the school's full curriculum offer.

After six weeks, the school will arrange a review meeting, with the student, parent and the referring school to discuss the young person's progress and next steps.

## **Promoting Good Attendance**

We consistently aim to promote the importance of good attendance by

- Informing all new students and their parents at the initial introduction meeting of the school's expectations
- Highlighting attendance and punctuality in student's school reports.
- Communicating with all parents of students whose attendance falls below 90% of timetabled lessons at the end of each term
- Informing parents of their child's percentage attendance and how this translates to the number of lessons missed

- Contacting families every day to establish the reason for their child's absence. If the school is unable to make contact via telephone, the school's Attendance Officer will e-mail the named contact
- Reporting student attendance/absence on a daily basis to the referring school (students at The Bridge are mainly dual registered)
- Working with the referring school's Attendance Officer
- Working with the school's mentor to set realistic targets to help support routines, which will improve attendance and punctuality.
- Referring students to counselling services if they are no longer under CAMHS
- Calling medical reviews with medical professionals and parents
- Celebrating and rewarding students for excellent attendance. This will be on a student by student basis
- Mailing Bridge postcards to students congratulating them for their commitment to attending school on a regular basis
- The Head of School making contact with families of students whose attendance is a cause for concern, with the aim of establishing the reason for absence and to explore any barriers affecting attendance
- Seeking support to help students and their families by engaging with CAMHS and any other professionals who may be working with the child and family
- Referring families to multi-agency teams who can provide additional targeted support to help improve attendance and punctuality.
- The school operates half termly parent group meetings where attendance is discussed
- Organising review meetings with families and the student to help meet the individual needs of the student, acknowledging that a one size fits all approach is not appropriate for The Bridge cohort. This may require revised timetables, reducing hours at school to rebuild the young person's confidence
- Working with the Local Authority Education Welfare Services as part of the new additional duties that the Department for Education has assigned to all Local Authorities. (DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance May 2022)

The Head of School analyses the school's attendance data on a weekly basis to identify students who are at potential risk of poor attendance and to intervene at an early stage, before attendance becomes a cause for concern and the student disengages from learning. Attendance review meetings will take place to develop strategies to support the student to attend school on a regular basis.

### **Type of Absence**

Every am/pm session absence from The Bridge will be classified by the school, where there is no medical evidence provided; The Attendance Officer will always refer to The Head of School for clarification. Unauthorised absences are for those that the school does not consider reasonable.

**Example of an unauthorised absence:**

- Parent keeping the child off school unnecessarily
- Unexplained absences
- Celebration events, such as birthdays
- Holidays taken during term time

**Reduced Timetable**

We appreciate our students are fragile, often suffering from low mood and extreme anxiety and may have been out of the education system for a considerable period. All of these factors contribute to students' reluctance to attend school. These issues require the parents to engage and work with the school and other professionals.

If The Budge concludes that all avenues have been explored and all the support available has been accessed and the student remains disengaged, or a student due to their medical needs is unable to attend The Bridge, then a meeting will take place between The Bridge, parent, the referring school and the Local Authority.

While "full-time" education is not defined in law, a student would typically be receiving their right to a full-time education by participating in all aspects of a full school day alongside children in the same school year. Therefore, the school will offer a reduced school day at the start of the integration process, which will be agreed by the referring school, the Local Authority and the family. In addition those students whose medical conditions are a barrier to full-time learning will also be offered a reduced timetable, providing there is supporting medical evidence. Reduced timetables will be reviewed on a regular basis and where possible, students who are on reduced hours will receive one to one teaching and additional interventions to help support and improve engagement.

This will not be a long-term solution and we would always seek to limit the time reduced timetables are in place.

At The Bridge, reduced timetable offers are part of a wider support plan and follows a graduated approach, with the view to students returning to a full time timetable.

**Punctuality**

Good timekeeping is a crucial life skill. Being on time supports a student to attend lessons in a calm manner and ready to learn. If a student misses part of a lesson or day, this leads to missed work and vital information delivered by their teacher. This can cause anxiety levels and disruption to their learning and a potential barrier to attending for fear of failure or embarrassment, which further encourages non-attendance.

The school's register is taken twice daily, each day counts as two sessions. The schools Attendance Officer is responsible for monitoring attendance and punctuality to school. Class teachers are responsible for monitoring student's arrival to class.

The school day is posted on the school website, displayed in the school reception and is made clear to students and their families.

A record of lateness is kept for each student; details of late marks are recorded on school reports and shared with parents. This is part of the wider attendance monitoring and lateness is recorded on attendance letters, which are sent to parents half-termly.

### **Illness and Medical Appointments**

Medical appointments during term time will need to be evidenced, reviewed and monitored by SLT. We encourage parents to arrange medical appointments outside of school time. Where possible students should return to school if the appointment finishes before the school day.

### **Absence from School**

**If a child is absent from school the parent/carer must adhere to the following procedure:**

- Contact the Bridge as soon as possible on the morning of the first day of absence before 9.30am
- Continue to call each morning explaining an absence of more than one day
- If your child has visited the GP or any other medical professional during the time of absence and you are in receipt of written evidence, a copy should be given to the Attendance Officer
- Long term absence (5 consecutive days) will require supporting medical evidence

### **If you child is absent we will:**

- Contact parents/carers every morning to establish the reason for a child's absence from school; this will happen as soon as is practical and the reason for absence will be recorded on the school's SIMS system
- Attempt to contact the student's emergency contacts if we are unable to obtain the reason for a student being absent. (The school holds at least two emergency contacts for students)
- The school will also email parents requesting contact is made with the school to explain the student's absence
- A home visit will be carried out if we have been unable to contact the family or the emergency contact
- For students under Social Care/Early Help the school will email details of the young person's absence to the relevant individual

If the school has been unable to contact the family the student will be classed as a "missing child" and a Police welfare check will be requested.

The Bridge will always meet with the parent to discuss the circumstances that led to the welfare check, or if the student is continually absent from school without good reason without supporting medical evidence.

If after a period of support and intervention the student does not re-engage with the school, a meeting will be held between the referring school, the parent, student, The Bridge and the placing Local Authority to explore an alternative educational provision.

### **Rewarding good attendance**

The Bridge is committed to working with our families to ensure students achieve the best possible attendance. Students who have excellent attendance reaching 90+% attendance against timetabled lessons, or achieve a significant improvement from their starting position are rewarded at the school's end of term rewards assembly.

Each class attendance is displayed on the school notice board together with the top attendees per year group. Personalised Bridge post cards are regularly set home to students in recognition of good attendance for the week. Overall attendance for the week is promoted through the school newsletter and on the school interactive TV.

School Attendance Officer Donna Leigh

[dleigh@bridge-life.co.uk](mailto:dleigh@bridge-life.co.uk)

01708 764370