



## Attendance Policy

The Folkestone School for Girls Academy Trust is known as “the school” in this policy.

### Preamble

**Attendance matters** - and as per our school ethos, it matters for much more than ‘just’ exam results. At The Folkestone School for Girls (FSG), we rate personal development and character education as of equal importance to academic success and therefore we try and make school not just about Maths, English, Geography and all the other subjects.

School is just as importantly about being a part of something, being surrounded by friends; learning new things, doing new things; experiencing new things; at FSG it’s about a whole host of other opportunities like DoE, CCF, Mountain Biking, Archery and Climbing... **missing school is missing out** on all of that - friends, opportunities, fun, belonging!

There is, too, naturally, a huge impact on attainment and achievement. Those who take an occasional day (or a week, or a fortnight) off school miss building blocks of knowledge. Catching up is a treadmill that becomes unmanageable, stressful and so their learning is fractured. Nationally over 75% of students with good school attendance achieve a pass grade in GCSE English and Maths. That drops to just 35% of students who were persistently absent ( $\leq 90\%$  attendance) and just 11% of students with severe absenteeism ( $\leq 50\%$  attendance). So very, very clearly **missing school is missing out** on realising your potential!

**School is a big, big part of a normal childhood experience, a shared experience. Without school that network of friends around us starts to diminish; Saturdays, Sundays and school holidays are just as impacted as friends fall by the wayside. We just can’t add to the conversation. We weren’t there to see Mr Smith in the school play; we weren’t there that day in History when you had to rap about Henry VIII and his six wives; we weren’t there on the field trip; we weren’t there to see this or that! Missing school is missing out! Attendance impacts academic results, personal development, friendships, mental health and resilience.**

### The Covid Effect

Over the course of the Covid pandemic, attendance to school has clearly been very significantly impacted - not just with two lockdowns but with advice and guidance following these often being to ‘stay away’ from school or work rather than the more normal approach of dosing oneself up and doing our best to attend! The concerns surrounding Covid, flu and cold viruses and the impact on the NHS continued to pose challenges beyond the pandemic, as have catch up hospital and dental appointments/procedures delayed during it. Clearly, this has had a massive impact on student, and indeed staff, attendance. Student attendance figures were typically around the 96% figure before covid and were down to 90% in the last academic year. That’s as true for FSG as it is for all schools. We all now need to try to get back to normality! Time not spent in school has an obvious impact on outcomes - academic and otherwise - and with all the disruption of late it’s important that we all try to come to school as often as is possible!

Whilst 90% in a test or exam would be a real achievement for most of us; a result that we'd happily shout from the rooftops, **90% attendance** is not so positive. It **equates to 1 day off a fortnight or almost 4 weeks - a whole month - over the academic year**. Employers would not accept that and as part of our role, as a school and as parents, is to prepare our young people for their working adult lives, attendance is something we must all work together on to improve. So, whilst of course we all get sick from time to time, we also need to, perhaps, just be that little bit more resilient and struggle on in when we are just a little under the weather.

All schools of course are also bound by the Department of Education to monitor and report on the attendance of all students. And when a student's attendance drops below 90% they are defined as a persistent absentee and we are required to request medical evidence to support an ill health absence. Without such evidence we are required to record the absence as unauthorised, and we may need to seek support from PIAS (KCC Inclusion and Attendance Service) and may need to issue a penalty notice.

Whilst 100% attendance is clearly the ideal, it is perhaps a lot to ask – after all we all get sick from time to time. However, the 'if in doubt, stay out' days are thankfully past us so a bit of a cold or headache shouldn't stop us from attending school. We monitor all of our student's attendance from the outset of the year and whilst a few days off in the early stages of the academic year can adversely affect average attendance and can, of course, sometimes be unavoidable, it is also potentially indicative of possible issues arising surrounding attendance. We recognise and celebrate outstanding attendance, and improved attendance but must also challenge when attendance to school is having a negative impact on progress – both academic and otherwise. So, accepting that occasionally we all get ill let's get back to the old way, as we did pre-pandemic; we dose ourselves up with Calpol, grab some tissues and a packet of 'loquets' and try to attend whenever possible!

It is also an inconvenient truth that many students nationally simply failed to return to full time education. EBSA is on the rise and the fear is that these students will be locked down forever if they cannot be re-integrated back to school. For some students then attendance to school remains a very real and daily challenge.

FSG is committed to the continuous raising of achievement of all our students. Regular attendance is critical if our students are to be successful and benefit from the opportunities presented to them.

One of our basic principles is to celebrate success. Good attendance is fundamental to a successful and fulfilling school experience. There is a very clear and obvious link between good attendance and good achievement.

For guidance, below 90% attendance (equivalent to 1 month's absence over the course of an academic year or 1 day off every fortnight) is considered by the Department for Education to evidence '**persistent absenteeism**'. Attendance of less than 50% is termed '**severe absenteeism**'

Within this, just as we do for punctuality, we look beyond the headline figures. So, 90% attendance in a year could be a result of 4 consecutive weeks off - for tonsillitis for example. Or it could represent 1 day off every week for 20 weeks. Those patterns of attendance within that headline figure then can be very different, with the second example painting a worrying picture.

The Trustees, Principal and Staff, in partnership with parents, have a duty to promote full attendance at FSG. We judge attendance as follows:

	An attendance level of above 98% is considered 'Outstanding'. An attendance level between 96% and 98% is considered 'Good'.
	An attendance level between 91% and 95% is considered to 'Require Improvement'.
	An attendance level below 90% is considered 'Inadequate'.

Acknowledging that we all get ill from time to time, we actively promote 'outstanding' attendance for all our students and we use a variety of termly and annual awards to promote good attendance and punctuality.

### **Parental Responsibility**

**Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their children attend school regularly and arrive on time.** Regular attendance is essential to the all-round development of the child and they should be allowed to take full advantage of educational opportunities available to them in order to make good progress in their learning and in their wider personal development. Poor attendance undermines their educational attainment and progress and can diminish friendships and social/personal development. FSG has a long established and enviable reputation of delivering outstanding academic results. However, the central tenet of our school vision and curriculum is that **exam results are what you get; they do not define who you are and will play only a part in shaping the person you become.**

Whilst exam results don't define us, it's an inconvenient truth that shyness can; a lack of confidence can! Those who lack confidence don't join in, don't sign up, don't take part, don't have a go. They settle! Opportunities are missed, options are narrowed, doors are closed. That lack of confidence starts to chart their course for the future and to define the person they become but working together, parents and school, can tackle that. We want our girls, your daughters, to realise that they are capable of more than they know. Good attendance at school is essential to enable your child to become all that they are capable of; to reach their full potential.

**It is the parents' responsibility to contact the school on the first day their child is absent. This is a safeguarding requirement so that all parties know that your child is safe and their whereabouts is known. Parents should regularly update the school and inform the school when their child is returning.**

Students are expected to arrive for 8.40am. All students that arrive late must report to reception where the reason for lateness is recorded.

### **Attendance & Mental Health**

Recently, EBSA (Emotionally Based School Avoidance) has seen a significant increase, in our school, nationally and indeed around the world.

What do I do if I am struggling to get my child to school?

The first thing to say is that you are not alone! A number of FSG students currently have low attendance, some well below 50% and it is clear that for these students attending school is extremely challenging. Nationally, the figures are truly harrowing and many children are missing out on a normal childhood experience; such is their physical or mental health, they are simply unable to attend despite the support of home and school. It is all too easy to blame parents for failing to get their child to school, but the reality is that many parents struggle despite their best efforts and intentions, so it is important to state that there is no judgement from us. We simply want to work with you to support re-integration somehow, sometime in the future and so the importance of keeping in touch is paramount.

As in all things though, prevention is better than cure and so as tempting as it is to permit a day off, this can easily become two, three, four ... and once a child is not attending, it is undoubtedly much harder to get them back to school. So, just as we look at attendance in the early years of school to spot potential problems arising, we ask that parents do the same and alert us as soon as possible when their child begins to struggle to attend or expresses that they don't want to attend.

To re-iterate there will be no judgement, just a desire to support families and girls to attend by looking at the push and pull factors at play.

There are some useful resources online to support families:

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/school-anxiety-and-refusal/>

<https://www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/addressing-emotionally-based-school-avoidance/>

<https://kentresiliencehub.org.uk/working-with-young-people/session-plans-activities/resources-for-specific-needs/emotional-wellbeing-advice-guidance-and-support-for-highly-anxious-pupils/>

### **Parents should:**

- encourage students to leave home in plenty of time in the mornings;
- provide explanations for all absences and inform the school if a student is going to be late;
- try to make medical appointments outside the school day;
- not take holidays in term time;
- provide medical evidence as necessary;
- support the school in trying to revert attendance back to pre-pandemic levels by re-adopting the less cautious pre-pandemic mindset. Less of the 'if in doubt, stay out' approach to attendance for fear of spreading illness, more of the normal 'if you can, get yourself in!'

### **Students should:**

- arrive on site by 8.40am or as otherwise directed;
- move purposefully between lessons and breaks and ensure they arrive punctually to all lessons - (a 5 min lesson changeover allowance is built into the school day);
- ensure that water bottles are full and any loo/comfort breaks are taken at break/lunch/lesson changeover, so as to minimise disruption to learning in lesson time;
- ensure parents explain any absence;
- be prepared to make up for time lost through absence and lateness;
- sign out at reception when leaving site for appointments.

### **School Staff**

At FSG there is a whole school responsibility and approach for improving school attendance, with specific staff taking individual responsibility.

### **Trustees**

Expect the Senior Leadership Team to report on attendance and punctuality data at each meeting and thereby monitor:

- the implementation of this policy;
- progress against school targets;
- issues of equal opportunity.

### **Principal**

Takes overall responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of this policy by:

- agreeing targets with the trustees and reporting progress regularly;
- giving attendance and punctuality a high profile with students, parents and staff;
- ensuring that there is sufficient funding to support reward systems;
- not authorising holidays during term time unless the circumstances are very exceptional;
- issuing a penalty notice in instances where the absence meets the required criteria.

**Senior Leaders in charge of Attendance Y7-11 and the Sixth Form should:**

- report termly to the Principal on student attendance, whole school, by cohort: disadvantaged, non-disadvantaged, SEN and by year group. **Lists of students who are persistently absent ( ≤ 90%) and severely absent (≤50%) are also to be provided and actions discussed with stakeholders including DoPC, pastoral and SEN teams, parents/carers and outside agencies if appropriate;**
- report on all students with attendance of ≤90% termly; issues, actions, impact, next steps;
- implement a system of rewards and sanctions, including certificates for outstanding attendance and for 100% attendance;
- prioritise students for trips and events based on attendance, behaviour, AtL;
- give attendance a high profile at assemblies, school events and in the bulletins;
- support SDLs on issues of non-attendance and internal truancy, remedying causes and applying sanctions;
- report on attendance to trustees via the Principal;
- be visible around the school, welcoming students and encouraging them to be punctual;
- be the very best of role models in terms of attendance and punctuality.

**Directors of Pastoral Care should:**

- set and monitor attendance targets for individual students and families;
- look for patterns of absence and consider impact of curriculum upon attendance alongside other possible causes;
- identify causes of absence, lateness and issues of equal opportunity;
- monitor unauthorised absences regularly and issue penalty notices;
- make CME referrals as required and inform parents/carers of concerns by termly alert/concern letters for persistent absenteeism and for absence of between 91% and 95% - “requires improvement”;
- meet with parents/carers to discuss attendance concerns when necessary;
- maintain records of meetings and other action taken when appropriate;
- work with the SENCO and other appropriate staff/agencies to create individual support and re-integration plans where appropriate;
- where attendance does not improve, send letters to say the school may need to stop authorising absences, or is no longer authorising absences without supporting medical evidence and again warn that a penalty notice referral may be made;
- meet with the Educational Welfare Officer regularly and report on all students with attendance of ≤90% termly, regardless of circumstances, issues, actions, impact and next steps;
- regularly meet with the Senior Leader responsible for attendance to review attendance at school/cohort/individual level;
- chase with SDLs all unauthorised absences to ensure census data is accurate;
- where the level of absence has not improved and there are unauthorised absences, the school will make a referral to the KCC Inclusion and Attendance Service using the Digital Front Door. If it is not clear a referral to the Service is appropriate, the school will consult with the Local Authority School Liaison Officer for advice. For the cases that require intensive family support, the school may make an Early Help Notification.

### **Student Development Leaders should:**

- monitor Sims on a daily basis;
- send alerts home for students who are not registered;
- chase unauthorised attendances with parents;
- follow up students/teachers for lesson absences when necessary;
- follow the school system of rewards and sanctions;
- liaise with outside agencies when appropriate;
- issue  $\leq 90\%$ , and 'requires improvement' letters at the end of each term where necessary;
- similarly, issue outstanding and 100% letters at the end of each term
- monitor absences regularly to identify patterns, triage concerns and adjust actions. For example, 10 consecutive days absence with parent reporting tonsillitis is not the same as 10 individual days of absence (a referral to DoPC might be unnecessary, a letter home might be unnecessary!)

These actions are not exhaustive and should not be seen as dependent on the prior action being completed, the approach should be flexible to fit the needs of individual students.

### **Attendance/Data Manager should:**

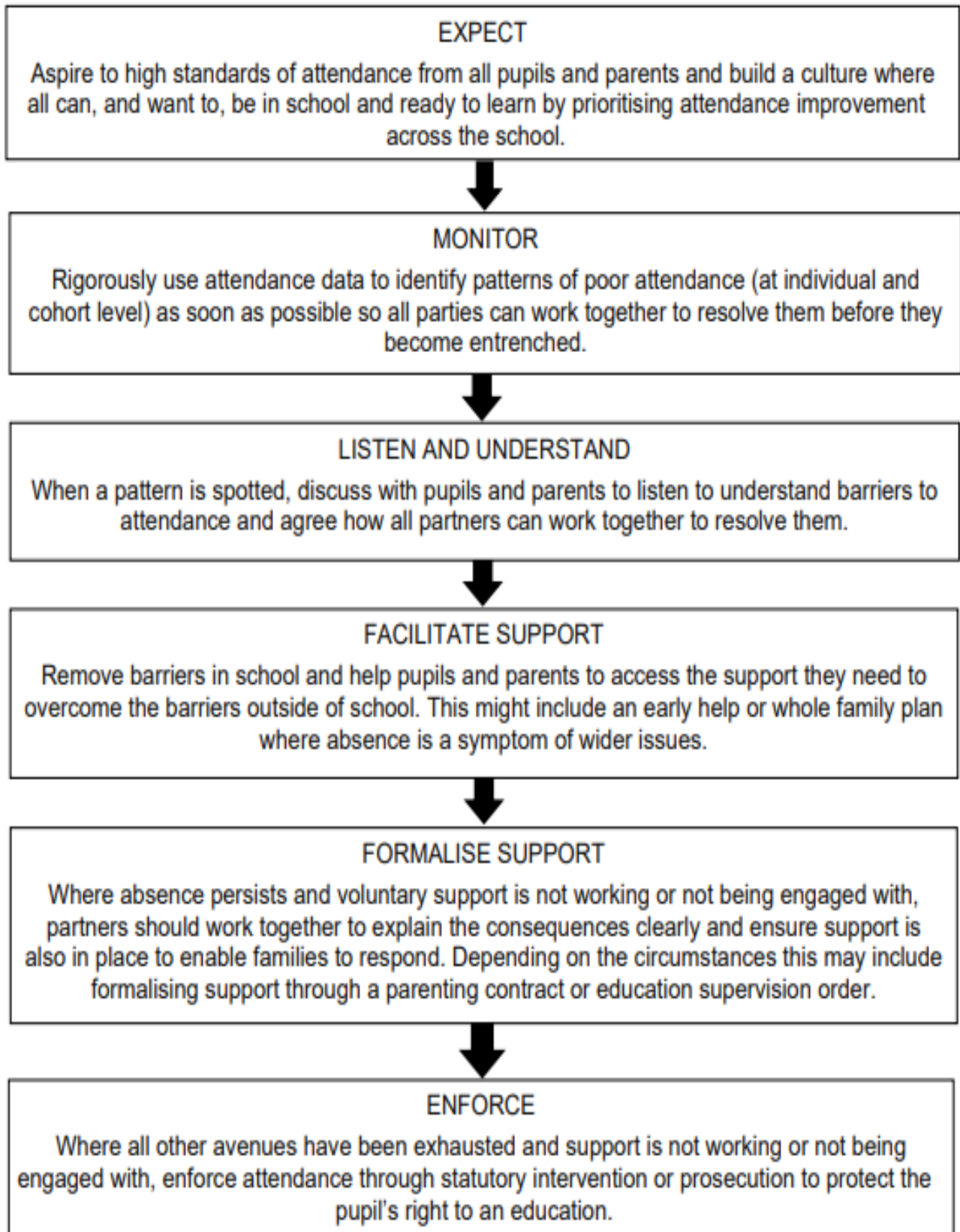
- oversee administration of the Sims register system, streamline and make adjustments to systems and procedures;
- update registers, generate data and implement first day response for absence;
- maintain and develop the systems needed to provide colleagues with attendance and punctuality data/reports on a termly basis, making information readily accessible;

### **Teachers should:**

- be a good role model for students in their own attendance;
- complete a register at the beginning of each lesson. Marking the attendance registers twice daily is a legal requirement. (The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006). Teachers mark students present, absent or late;
- make lessons stimulating and fun, praising and thanking students for their contributions;
- give attendance/punctuality a high profile by praising students for arriving on time and arranging for latecomers to make up time;
- inform the SDL when absence is impacting upon achievement and monitor for patterns of absence/truancy;
- be 'another set of eyes.'

# Attendance is everyone's issue!

At FSG, we



## **Children Missing in Education**

Where a child is missing from school, and parents/carers have failed to inform the school of the child's whereabouts, SDLs will attempt to make contact with parents/carers on the first day of absence and on each subsequent day.

In the event that a child misses **3 days of school** in this way a member of the school staff will be required to pay a home visit or make a video call to establish the child's whereabouts and safety. If by day 5 we are still unaware of the child's whereabouts and safety we will be forced to refer the matter to local authority safeguarding team.

**No child should be removed from the school roll** without consultation between the Principal and the Inclusion and Attendance Service when appropriate. Where a child is missing from education, local authority guidance will be followed, by completing a Child Missing in Education referral form for the following circumstances:-

- if the whereabouts of the child is unknown and the school has failed to locate them;
- the family has notified the school that they are leaving the area but no Common Transfer Form (pupil file) has been requested by another school.

## **Authorising Absence**

Only the Principal can authorise absence using a consistent approach. The Principal is not obliged to accept a parent's explanation. A letter or telephone message from a parent does not in itself authorise an absence. If absences are not authorised, parents will be notified. If no explanation is received, absences will not be authorised. Absence (for example leave for holidays) during term time can only be approved in "exceptional circumstances". The following reasons are examples of absence that will not be authorised:

- persistent nonspecific illness eg: poorly/unwell;
- absence of siblings if one child is ill;
- oversleeping;
- inadequate clothing/uniform;
- confusion over school dates;
- medical/dental appointments of more than half a day without very good reasons;
- child/family birthday;
- shopping trip;
- family Holidays (with some rare exceptions).

Persistent unauthorised absence (10% or more of the school year) may result in an AS1 referral to the Local Authority School Liaison Officer for consideration of prosecution. The school will follow procedures prior to referral and parents will be notified in writing. When a referral is made, the child's Registration Certificate, copies of all letters sent to parents and minutes of any meetings **need to** be attached to the completed AS1 referral form with any other relevant information.

**Local Authority Action may include:-**

- attendance improvement meeting;
- home visits;
- liaison with other agencies;
- fast track to prosecution.



## **Penalty Notices Proceedings for Poor Attendance**

Penalty Notices are issued in accordance with Kent County Council's Education Penalty Notices Code of Conduct effective from January 2016 and revised in April 2017.

A Penalty Notice can only be issued in cases of absence for 10 or more half day sessions (5 school days) without authorisation during any 100 possible school sessions or period of 50 days of schooling - these do not need to be consecutive. A Penalty Notice can also be issued where an excluded child is found in a public place during school hours.

After the appropriate request for a Penalty Notice is received, the KCC Inclusion and Attendance Service will issue a warning letter setting out 15 school days during which no unauthorised absence is to be recorded. If unauthorised absence is recorded during the 15-day period a Penalty Notice will be issued (one per parent per child).

### **Exceptional circumstances could include:**

- Service personnel returning from a tour of duty abroad where it is evidenced the parent will not be in receipt of any leave in the near future that coincides with school holidays.
- Where an absence from school is recommended by a health professional as part of a parent's or child's rehabilitation from a medical or emotional issue.
- The death or terminal illness of a person close to the family.
- To attend a wedding or funeral of a person close to the family.
- Any strong personal reasons why a family might need to take a child away from school for a short break.

Any examples provided are illustrative rather than exhaustive. It is acceptable to take a student's previous record of attendance into account when the school is making decisions. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short and by 'unavoidable' it implies that an event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. It is important to note that Headteachers can agree the absence of a child in exceptional circumstances and this discretion can be used also to determine the length of the authorised absence.

Where Penalty Notices are imposed, the regulations state that the penalty will be £120 to be paid within 28 days, reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days. Penalty Notices are issued to each parent of each child. Failure to pay the penalty in full by the end of the 28-day period will result in prosecution by the Local Authority.

Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 says that parents are **guilty** of an offence of failing to secure regular attendance at school unless they can prove that the child was absent:

- with leave (the school has given permission);
- due to sickness or any unavoidable cause (the sickness or unavoidable cause must relate to the child, not the parent);
- religious observance;
- failure by the Local Authority to provide transport.

In law, these are the only acceptable reasons for a child being absent from school.

The Principal may authorise absence in "exceptional circumstances" but this must be requested in advance and agreement to each request is at the discretion of the Principal, acting on behalf of the Board of Trustees (Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006). Each case will be judged on its merits and the Principals decision is final. Once the decision not to authorise leave is taken, it cannot be authorised retrospectively.

If the absence is not authorised and the holiday is taken anyway, the case may be referred to the Inclusion and Attendance Service who may issue a Penalty Notice to each parent for each child taken out of school. Failure to pay the penalty in full by the end of the 28-day period will result in prosecution by the Local Authority.

## **Punctuality**

**Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their children attend school regularly and arrive on time.**

Poor punctuality is ill mannered, disrupts the education of other students, disrupts teachers and of course impacts on progress. It also does not bode well for employment. It shows a lack of personal responsibility and a lack of self-leadership.

Thus, in line with our school commitment to the CDI Careers Framework, to personal development and to character education, lateness to school is recorded and published on school reports. Two pieces of information are published:-

1. The total number of minutes late, cumulatively, over the academic year to date and;
2. The number of incidences of lateness.

In this way, the school aims to use 'best endeavours' to fairly reflect punctuality, acknowledging that a late rural bus causing a delay on one single day, say, of 90 mins late arrival to school, is not the same as 90 cumulative minutes built up over 10 separate incidents.

As for attendance, should any student's punctuality be identified as of concern earlier in the year, or since a report was issued, then a separate letter home may be issued. Just as DfE guidance highlights persistent absenteeism, identifying this as  $\leq 90\%$ , at FSG we also consider students who have 10 incidences of lateness or more to be persistent latecomers. Whilst acknowledging our rural intake and the ongoing reliability issues of public transport, it is also right to tackle persistent latecomers and we see 10 incidences as being indicative of this.

Students who are regularly late for school may be placed on a punctuality report with the time late made up through detentions.

## **Penalty Notice Proceedings for Lateness**

Penalty Notices are issued in accordance with Kent County Council's Education Penalty Notices Code of Conduct effective from January 2016, as revised in April 2017, when:

- 10 incidents of late arrival after the registers have closed during any possible 100 school sessions leads to a Penalty Notice Warning Letter;
- The Penalty Notice Warning Letter sets out 15 school days during which no unauthorised absence is to be recorded;
- If unauthorised absence is recorded during the 15-day period, a Penalty Notice(s) will be issued (one per parent per child);
- Where a Penalty Notice is not paid within 28 days of issue the Local Authority will instigate court proceedings.