



BONITAS
Multi-Academy Trust

ADDENDUM TO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICIES SEPTEMBER 2020

Date approved by Board of Trustees	25 September 2020
Date of next review	Reviewed routinely in line with DfE policy
Published	School websites

CONTEXT

Following the period of enforced closure resulting from COVID-19, on 7 August 2020 the Department for Education (DfE) published guidelines for all schools. The purpose of these guidelines was to provide clarity relating to the expectations of schools, pupils and parents on the full reopening of schools in September 2020.

All schools are required to adhere to the DfE guidance and in the interests of ensuring that all academies within the Bonitas Multi-Academy Trust are compliant with the expectations, the Board of Trustees have published this addendum to be read in conjunction with each academy's individual policy on attendance.

1 KEY PRINCIPLES

In its guidance, the DfE identifies the following key principles:

- 1.1 Returning to school is vital for children's education and for their wellbeing. Time out of school is detrimental for children's cognitive and academic development, particularly for disadvantaged children. This impact can affect both current levels of learning and children's future ability to learn, and therefore we need to ensure all pupils can return to school sooner rather than later.
- 1.2 The risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from coronavirus (COVID-19) is very low and there are negative health impacts of being out of school. We know that school is a vital point of contact for public health and safeguarding services that are critical to the wellbeing of children and families.
- 1.3 Lower academic achievement also translates into long-term economic costs due to having a less well-qualified workforce. This affects the standard of living that today's pupils will have over the course of their entire life. For many households, school closures have also affected their ability to work. As the economy begins to recover, we need to remove this barrier so parents and carers can return to work.
- 1.4 Schools and trusts are expected to work closely with parents and staff, as they normally would, when agreeing the best approaches for their circumstances. Where the personal circumstances of parents and/or staff create added concerns, schools and trusts should discuss these. We want all pupils and staff to be back in schools, and believe the conditions are right for this, but some people will understandably have worries that should be heard and addressed.

2 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS OF SCHOOLS AND PARENTS

2.1 Mandatory school attendance

School attendance is mandatory again from the beginning of the autumn term. This means from that point, the usual rules on school attendance will apply, including:

- parents' duty to secure that their child attends regularly at school where the child is a registered pupil at school and they are of compulsory school age;
- schools' responsibilities to record attendance and follow up absence;

- the availability to issue sanctions, including fixed penalty notices in line with local authorities' codes of conduct

2.2 Exceptions - pupils who are shielding or self-isolating

A small number of pupils will still be unable to attend in line with public health advice because they are self-isolating and have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves; or because they are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19).

Shielding advice for all adults and children paused on 1 August, subject to a continued decline in the rates of community transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). This means that even the small number of pupils who will remain on the shielded patient list can also return to school, as can those who have family members who are shielding.

If rates of the disease rise in local areas, children (or family members) from that area, and that area only, will be advised to shield during the period where rates remain high and therefore they may be temporarily absent.

Some pupils no longer required to shield but who generally remain under the care of a specialist health professional may need to discuss their care with their health professional before returning to school (usually at their next planned clinical appointment).

Where a pupil is unable to attend school because they are complying with clinical and/or public health advice, schools are expected to be able to immediately offer them access to remote education. Schools will monitor engagement with this activity.

Where children are not able to attend school as parents are following clinical and/or public health advice, absence will not be penalised.

All other pupils must attend school.

3 SUPPORT FOR PUPILS AND FAMILIES WHO ARE ANXIOUS ABOUT RETURN TO SCHOOL

Schools in the trust will work proactively and sensitively with families to re-engaging pupils at risk of disengagement, including vulnerable children, those previously persistently absent and those who have not engaged with school during lockdown in order to secure their return to full time education.

Schools are expected to bear in mind the potential concerns of pupils, parents and households who may be reluctant or anxious about returning and put the right support in place to address this. This may include pupils who have themselves been shielding previously but have been advised that this is no longer necessary, those living in households where someone is clinically vulnerable, or those concerned about the comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds or who have certain conditions such as obesity and diabetes.

If parents of pupils with significant risk factors are concerned, it is recommended that schools discuss these concerns and provide reassurance of the measures they are putting in place to reduce the risk in school.

Schools should be clear with parents that pupils of compulsory school age must be in school unless a statutory reason applies (for example, the pupil has been granted a leave of absence, is unable to attend because of sickness, is absent for a necessary religious observance etc).

4 ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

In addition to communicating clear and consistent expectations relating to school attendance to families, schools are required to:

- identify pupils who are reluctant or anxious about returning or who are at risk of disengagement and develop plans for re-engaging them. This should include disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people, especially those who were persistently absent prior to the pandemic or who have not engaged with school regularly during the pandemic
- use additional catch-up funding, as well as existing pastoral and support services, attendance staff and resources and schools' pupil premium funding to put measures in place for those families who will need additional support to secure pupils' regular attendance
- work closely with other professionals as appropriate to support the return to school, including continuing to notify the child's social worker, if they have one, of non-attendance
- record absence etc in the usual way, but also indicating, using the designated code, where a pupil is not attending in circumstances relating to coronavirus (COVID-19)
- regularly review attendance data in order to inform decisions about where to focus efforts to intervene early and prevent patterns of poor attendance becoming habitual and entrenched
- regularly use data to assess the effectiveness of attendance policies and adjust provision in what is likely to be a changing context.