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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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**Implementation:** It is the responsibility of line managers to ensure that staff members are aware of and understand this policy and any subsequent revisions.

**Compliance:** This policy complies with all relevant regulations and other legislation as detailed in the *Compliance with Regulations & Legislation Statement*.

**“Eldest school refusal, long story, been coming a long time. If only the school had adapted their methods of communicating to her in the same way they have tried to adapt their teaching to work with her learning difficulties, then perhaps we wouldn't be where we are today.”**  
**ASD Friendly Parent Blog 2011**

## 2.0 GENERAL

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### **Ethos**

Options Higford is committed to the principles stated in this policy document. We sincerely believe that all students benefit from the education we provide, and therefore from regular school attendance. In order to achieve this, we will take appropriate action to ensure that all students achieve the maximum possible attendance and that any barriers, which may impede full attendance, are addressed as quickly as possible. Understanding and addressing issues related to each student's autism and complex needs in order to support their school attendance will be a priority.

Options Higford recognises the importance of attendance in school and is fully aware of the correlation between high levels of attendance and attainment. Options Higford seeks to provide an environment and foster an ethos where high levels of attendance are the norm, while providing support and encouragement to improve, whenever high levels of attendance are not achieved.

Options Higford is committed to the 'Every Child Matters' agenda and fully recognises the impact that attendance has on the five outcomes of the agenda.

### **Aims:**

Options Higford aims to ensure that:

- All students have an equal right and access to, an education in accordance with the National Curriculum, that meets their needs as a learner with Autism and Complex Needs
- No student will be deprived of their educational opportunities by, either their own absence or lateness, or that of other students.

**It is recognised that:**

- The majority of students want to attend school to learn, to engage with school staff and activities alongside their peers, and to prepare themselves fully to take their place in society
- Some students may need to be supported and rewarded in meeting their attendance obligations and responsibilities
- It is the responsibility of parents/carers to ensure a child's attendance at school as required by law (ref Section 7, 1996 Education Act) and Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013. At Options Higford this entails the commitment and support of a teamwork approach between Care and Education teams, with families, and with the support of the Clinical Team as appropriate.
- It is the responsibility of education staff to ensure school is motivating and accessible to promote student attendance, personalised to each student's need

### **3.0 EXPECTATIONS**

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**Options Higford expects that all our students will:**

- Attend school regularly
- Arrive on time and be appropriately prepared for the day

**Options Higford expects that families, care staff, and our Clinical Team will:**

- Endeavour to arrange health appointments out of school hours wherever possible
- Inform a student's teacher, Headteacher or Deputy-Headteacher of any reason or problem that may prevent a student from attending school
- Fulfil their legal responsibilities and ensure that students attend school
- Inform school, as soon as is practical and preferably early on the morning of absence, whenever a student is unable to attend school
- Seek permission from the school for any leave of absence.

**Parents/Carers and students can expect the following from the school:**

- Regular, efficient and accurate recording of attendance
- Early contact with family or care staff when a student is absent without explanation
- Action on any attendance problem notified to the school
- Education staff supporting positive transitions from home to school or care to school as appropriate
- Referral of specific attendance issues to supporting agencies where appropriate
- Attendance figures published in each Student's Annual Education Review Report
- Flexibility and understanding around a student's attendance pattern where related to their Autism and Complex Needs. Examples may include:
- An agreed delayed start to the day to support positive travel from home to school for a day student
- Education staff supporting a prolonged transition into school from care by working on personalised strategies with the student within the care-setting
- Accurate recording of arrival into / departure from school in order to inform planning and reporting in order to promote and sustain appropriate attendance / punctuality

**We encourage attendance by:**

- Consistent, clear communication with parents / carers and students about the importance of regular, attendance
- Setting targets for improved attendance if needed and sharing these with Local Authority Representatives, parents / carers and students
- The accurate completion of registers at the start of each session, and within 15 minutes of the start of each session.
- A coordinated Team-work approach from the Care and Education Teams, with the support of our Clinical Team, to promote full attendance from each student. The focus will be on meeting a student's personalised needs as a learner with Autism and Complex Needs to ensure that they feel safe and motivated to attend school. This will include the clear use of visual supports for transitioning into school as appropriate to each student. Targets for attendance / punctuality / transition times may form part of the IEP if appropriate.

**The school will respond to non-attendance by:**

- For day students or following home-contact, by contacting parents / carers on the first day of an absence if no reason for absence has been received. (Contact will be by telephone or email)
- Where a pattern of non-attendance / transition problems is emerging a 'Child Centred Planning' multi-disciplinary Meeting will be convened and the parent / carer invited to visit school to work with school staff to help resolve the difficulties where appropriate
- Where there is no response to school intervention and where the absence or pattern of absence has persisted without explanation, the school can refer to the placing Local Authority.

#### **4.0 HOLIDAY ABSENCE**

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The school acknowledges that from time to time some parents / carers will want to take their children out of school for holidays or special events. While we do not encourage this activity it is within the Head Teacher's power to grant a reasonable amount of holiday leave (usually a maximum of 5 days) in any academic year. The school considers that these occasions should be kept to a minimum and that repeat requests within that same year will not be authorised.

On occasion, a request may be received for an extended period of absence over and above the usual 5-day holiday request. It is expected that these occasions would be exceptional and that the necessity for, and the timing and length of such leave will require careful consideration by the family and school.

In general, Options Higford will consider applications of 5 days or less in any one academic year, if prior attendance is in line with year targets, but will only authorise any longer periods of absence due to holiday in exceptional circumstances