

St George's School – EMA Guidelines 2009

AUTHORISED AND UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

Introduction

1. In general a student should be paid only where they have attended **punctually** all the sessions for which they are required to register for EMA purposes. If the student has failed to attend, then the student should receive no EMA payment for that week, and the school will notify the APB to that effect in its weekly return. If the student does not attend registration on time, then the student will receive no EMA payment for that week.

2. It is acceptable for the school to deem absence or a single case of late arrival to be authorised. Where an absence is authorised, the student will still be entitled to the weekly EMA payment as though he/she has attended in full. However, if the scale of the student's absence becomes extensive, payments cease to be made, even if there is a legitimate reason for the absence

3. The fundamental principle is that it is for the school to decide whether a particular absence is to be authorised or not. But in taking such decisions, the school will take account of the guidance in this document and we are obliged to do so under the formal scheme arrangements made by the Secretary of State. The guidelines impose a real burden on students to attend registration on time, attend lessons, work hard, and if ill or absent or needing leave of absence, take responsibility to manage this in an adult way. If students do not meet these requirements, they can only have themselves to blame if they lose payments.

General principles

4. In deciding whether an absence should be authorised or not, the school will take account of three general principles:

- the presumption is that any absence or late arrival for registration should be considered to be **unauthorised**, unless there is a valid reason otherwise. In other words, where there is an absence there is no requirement for the school or college **proactively to justify its decision** not to authorise the absence;
- if the claimed reason for absence could have been foreseen, then the student should have applied for authorised absence in advance. So, for example, it might be acceptable for a student to miss school for a funeral if this was applied for in advance; but **it would not be acceptable to miss classes without prior notification** and then to claim that the absence should be authorised.
- where the claimed reason for absence could not reasonably have been foreseen, schools and colleges should consider whether the absence was really unavoidable. An absence which could not have been notified in advance should be notified to the school or college on the day in question. The student concerned must phone main reception. Unless, exceptionally, there is a good reason why this could not be done, the absence should not be authorised without such notification.

In operating these principles, the school will try to ensure that decision making processes are transparent, and that there is equitable application of rules across all their EMA students. As his

responsibility crosses all four houses, the Pastoral Deputy Head should be the first point of contact to a tutor trying to decide if an absence can be authorised or not.

Absences which can be foreseen in advance

5. Absences should only be authorised in advance if the reason given for the absence is a good one. The following are examples of reasons for absence which would tend to be acceptable:

- a medical appointment which cannot be arranged outside school or college hours.
- a particular need to look after a family member or another person for whom the student **has caring responsibilities**. However, the school will not regularly authorise absences for a student for this reason. Where such responsibilities are regularly interrupting attendance patterns, there is a need to explore solutions personally with the student
- a religious holiday.
- a visit to a University either to attend an open day or for interview: or a career related interview
- an appointment with a Connexions Advisor (although these should normally be scheduled to avoid disruption to studies)
- a work experience placement which is an integral part of a course, and for which the student does not receive a wage
- participating in a significant extra-curricular activity, such as drama, music, sport or volunteering. Authorised absence should only be granted where the activity reflects a significant level of personal achievement (for example, taking part in a regional or national event), or for some other one-off event. Authorised absences under this criterion should be granted sparingly; where a pattern of frequent participation in such activities is proposed, there is a need to explore solutions personally with the student
- attendance at a probation meeting
- attendance at a funeral
- participation in a representative sports fixture
- severe disruption to a student's mode of transport (for example, where a student commutes by rail and a rail strike means there is no practical way of getting to school or college)
- a driving test or lesson (we expect the latter to be taken outside lesson time although non contact time might be used)
- a school or college representatives' meeting (e.g. Governors meeting).

- Study leave for examination preparation

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and school staff will take account of: the inherent reasonableness of any case; the number of absences taken by any one individual; repetitions of the same excuse; and whether the excuse is backed up with evidence.

6. The following reasons for absence would *not* generally be acceptable:

- holidays
- part or full time work which is not part of the student's programme of study
- leisure activities
- birthdays or similar celebrations
- babysitting younger siblings
- shopping
- missing taught time for driving lessons

This list is not intended to be exhaustive

Absences or late marks which cannot be foreseen in advance

7. Where an absence genuinely could not be foreseen in advance, the student should nevertheless make arrangements to tell the school as soon as possible on the day in question that they will be missing classes. The school nurse is the person who must be spoken to: the school nurse will log such calls. Where a student has failed to do this, the absence should not be treated as authorised, and therefore the student should not receive EMA for the week in question.

8. The only exception to the principle in paragraph 7 is where the young person can supply a strong reason why they failed to contact the school. This might be because an event has been particularly disturbing or unpleasant, or because there has been a genuine practical barrier.

9. The following are examples of reasons for absence which would tend to be acceptable, provided that the school or college has been notified on the day:

- an emergency situation involving a family member or another person for whom the student has caring responsibilities. Sudden severe illness would be an example. However, while such cases should be treated sympathetically on a one-off-basis, they should not be acceptable as regular grounds for authorising absence.
- one off transport problems, where these were not known about in advance, and where there is no alternative means to hand. **DfES consultation suggests that it is reasonable to expect students to walk 3 miles if they do not have a relevant disability**

This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

In assessing the significance of late arrival for registration, the Data manager will assume that an L is unwarranted and not excused and thus disqualify the student from payment in that week. If the tutor has indicated in the register that there has been a legitimate one-off reason with which they concur, the late mark will be disregarded and a payment can be made.

Sickness

10. In general isolated periods of genuine sickness need *not* preclude payment of EMA. However, EMA will not be paid if a student is away for a full week, or where a student has an absence in a week and at that time their overall absence in the sessions since the start of the year is 10% or more. This does not mean that the school is necessarily disputing that the student's sickness is genuine. Rather, it derives from the foundation idea that EMA is intended to cover the costs incurred through attendance in education, and so should not be paid if the student is not attending for a significant period. In such instances, the absence might be formally recorded in the register as authorised – but a note passed to the school nurse that those sessions cannot qualify for EMA payment. Also, the school will turn down applications for authorised sickness absence if we have reason to doubt the validity of the cause of absence. Clearly an emerging pattern of non-attendance due to sickness without explanation would be unacceptable. The school intends to implement a policy of not automatically accepting sickness as a reason for authorised absence. The Pastoral Deputy Head is responsible, assisting the students tutor to make fair judgements consistent across houses.

If a student becomes ill during the course of the day, they must report sick to the school nurse. If they do not do so, and are found to have registered but then missed a class, truancy rather than illness will be seen as the cause of the absence.

"Second chances"

11. It is inevitable that the school will see a situation where we are doubtful that a student is telling the truth, but we would find it hard to prove this. An example might be where a student fails to phone in having allegedly woken up sick, but claims that the household telephone was out of order. Where something of this nature happens for the first time in a student's EMA career, the approach will be to accept the excuse, but to make clear that this is the only occasion on which a dubious excuse will be accepted for this student.

Truancy from required activity

12. It will be the responsibility of the Data Manager to make all staff aware of EMA qualified students, and staff will be directed to highlight or denote them in their own subject records. Subject staff must take a register for each lesson. Where an EMA qualified student is absent and the teacher suspects they may have registered (e.g. because they do not appear on the house office list from that morning as an absentee), the Head of House must be made aware of this by voicemail or memo. Absence from a lesson has the same status as unauthorised absence from tutor registration in its effect on EMA payment. If it is discovered that a student has been absent from a lesson after the EMA payment has already been made, a payment in a subsequent week will be withheld in order to make good the over payment. This also applies if a student misses any other required activity at St George's school. This includes, but is not limited to, chapels, assemblies, Friday 5 sessions, supervised study, detentions, mentoring, tutor time, core PE, and so on. It would also apply if a student is absent from a fire alert and had not signed out as required.

It is the role of the Assistant Head 14-19 to liaise with staff teaching St George's students within the consortium, and make sure that EMA payments are adjusted accordingly if a class has been missed without authorisation.

Study leave

13. Students should receive their weekly payment during periods of authorised study leave preceding examinations until they have sat their final examination.

General authorisations

14. The school reserves the right to issue a general authorisation of absence in some circumstances - for example, severe weather.

Bonus Payments

The school's method for determining bonus payments is based around the tutor card system. A student who avoids the award of either a single R grade, or two X minus grades, or a worse score than this, in the card immediately before bonus months (January and June), will have a bonus payment made. Students can appeal against non-payment to the Pastoral Deputy Head. It is hard to imagine what exceptional circumstances could lead such an appeal to be successful.

Roles

- Tutors are responsible for collecting from student's notes from home that would allow absences to be authorised. The register should be marked to show absences are authorised. Tutors consult the Head of House if uncertain as to whether an absence can be authorised. The tutor is responsible for making clear to students if an absence will not be authorised and therefore an EMA payment will not be made
- It is the role of the Data Manager to review registers each week, identify students whose previous week's attendance qualifies them for EMA, and to make the return to direct payment.
- The school nurse takes calls from students who are absent, and passes a note of such calls to tutors. The school nurse logs such calls.
- It is the job of the Head of House to make clear to the Data Manager each week where there is a circumstance which would void that week's attendance and rule out payment e.g. where the student had registered with tutor but missed a lesson.
- The Data Manager is responsible for making clear to students, tutors, and subject staff where their responsibilities lie.
- The Assistant Head 14-19 will be the point of contact for off-site teachers in consortium schools, to flag students who have not attended classes there. Where such absences are unauthorised, payments will be withheld.
- It is the role of the Data Manager to brief and train tutors on their role in EMA; to inform 6th form teachers names of students who qualify for EMA; to impress on all 6th form teachers the need to keep accurate registers and to inform him if truancy is suspected by an EMA student; and to supply EMA qualified students with a copy of these guidelines and brief them on the system at the start of the autumn term in Year 12.
- It is the job of the Data Manager to provide the Pastoral Deputy Head with tutor card information to determine bonus payments; and make the bonus payment return. She is also to ensure students moving from Year 11 into 12, or external entrants, are aware of their obligation to pass to the school proof of their EMA entitlement.
- It is the job of the Pastoral Deputy Head, to be the point of appeal for students against judgements made by tutors and Houses which have led to EMA not being paid. Such appeals will be heard in the context of the school guidelines listed above.