ACS Attendance Policy (Doha)

Please note:

Where ACS International Schools is operating outside of the United Kingdom (UK), the UK regulatory framework will provide the foundation for best practice as far as this policy is concerned. All ACS schools will operate in compliance with the relevant legislation of the country in which they are operating.

ACS International Schools is committed to protecting individuals' personal data and aims to remain compliant with data protection laws and guidance from the relevant regulators. ACS further commits to ensuring that the planning and writing of all policies and procedures that involve the handling of personal data are guided by the principle of privacy by design, and that individuals' rights to have their data safeguarded are a paramount consideration in ACS' pursuit of all its operational and strategic practices.

ACS is committed to inclusion across race, gender, faith, identity and abilities. We believe that diversity helps us to fulfil our purpose, realize our vision and exemplify our values.

Document Status

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1 Policy Statement

1.1 ACS notes that educational research shows regular attendance at school is an important factor in students' academic progress and personal development.

1.2 This policy will be monitored and reviewed biannually.

1.3 The use of the words parent and parents in this policy is intended to refer to the legal guardian of the student. No assumption of biological parentage is implied.

1.4 ACS acknowledges the responsibilities outlined by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education for parents, private schools, and governing bodies—working in close collaboration with local authorities.

1.5 ACS vigorously supports school attendance because:

- Education is compulsory in the State of Qatar (see section 2).
- Students' social-emotional and personal development requires interaction and engagement that comes naturally with being in school.
- Regular school attendance supports good mental health for students and promotes healthy family relationships.
- Attendance is closely related to academic achievement: students with higher rates of attainment consistently have better school attendance records. Attendance rates below 95% often negatively impact academic progress. Research in the UK has indicated that a single missed day of school impacts a student's life chances.

2. Compulsory Education

2.1 The State of Qatar requires that children that reach their 6th birthday in any given academic year until age 18 are in education full time.

2.2 Specifically, Law No. 25 of 2001 (Mandatory Education) states that:

Article 3 – Law 25, State of Qatar

> The Legal Guardian of a child who turns six years of age at any time between the beginning of any school year or the last day of December of such year shall be obliged to enroll the child in mandatory education and ensure the child remains in mandatory education until he or she completes the Secondary stage of education or when he or she becomes 18 years of age whichever is the sooner.

3. Records of Student Attendance and Student Absence

3.1 Attendance records will be maintained, and each absence from school must be explained by the responsible parent.

3.2 If permission for absence is not given or ten days' unauthorized absence exceeded in a given school year, the family is in breach of ACS School Policy and may be in breach of Qatari Law 25, and the school is obliged to report unauthorized absences to the Ministry.

3.3 Since a child's attendance at school is primarily the responsibility of his or her parent(s) and the student himself or herself, the parent(s) must verify the reasons for the dates of absence in writing, at the request of the school.

3.4 When a student wishes to be excused before the close of the school day, permission must first be secured by the parents from the school.

3.5 The Head of School must authorize a student to be absent for any reason other than illness, and they may delegate the authority to authorize specific reasons for absence to divisional school leaders (for example, performing *Umrah*).

3.6 A complete register of attendance will be made at the beginning of each morning in Lower School and, in the case of middle and high school settings, at the beginning of each lesson. The register will record which students are present and absent from school, including which students are attending approved educational activities outside school, which students are unable to attend school through exceptional circumstances, which students are taking authorized leave of absence and which students are taking unauthorized leave of absence.

3.7 The parent of any student on the list whose absence is unexplained will be contacted to ascertain the reason for the absence, and a written explanation for the absence will be required from the student's parent upon the student's return to school.

3.8 The Head of School shall set up controls to prevent/detect truancy and to decide appropriate consequences for students who are truant from school.

3.9 It is the Head of School's responsibility for seeing that the ACS Attendance Policy, Law 25 and any MOEHE Circulars specific to attendance are always enforced.

4 Students' Arrival/Departure from School

4.1 Supervision of students will begin not less than 30 minutes before the time set for the beginning of registration. Students may not arrive at school and remain unsupervised earlier than this, except as follows:

- When earlier arrival is made necessary because of bus schedules.
- When students are requested to come earlier for participation in school activities.
- When the parent or guardian has applied for and been granted an exception by the administration.

4.2 No student shall be permitted to leave the school at recess or at any other time before the regular closing hour, except as follows:

- When permission has been granted by the school and/or divisional office, at the request of the parent.
- When pursuing an approved schedule of school activities which requires the student to leave the school (for example a field trip).
- When the parent or guardian has agreed to allow students to leave as part of open campus

4.3 Students shall be instructed to go home, or elsewhere as directed by the parent, immediately following the close of the school day, unless attending a regularly organized program of instruction, recreation, or school activity which follows the dismissal of school.

4.4 Parents of Early Childhood and Lower School students must notify the Divisional Principal or divisional secretary of any deviation from a child's regular routine for leaving school. If a child is to be collected by another child's parent or another adult or authorized older sibling because of a play date or similar privately arranged event, the parents of *all* the affected children must notify the school.

4.5 Students shall be required to remain in the appointed place while waiting for the school bus, following dismissal.

4.6 Parents or others authorized to care for a child shall be notified before a child is sent home or elsewhere, at other than the regular time of dismissal.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Governing body

As part of ACS' whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, the governing body will:

- ensure that the importance of attendance is made clear by promoting the relevant school policies and guidance directed at parents and staff;

- annually review the school's attendance rules and ensure that all provisions are in place to allow school staff, parents and children to implement the rules effectively;
- ensure that all legislation regarding attendance is complied with and that up-to-date guidelines are communicated to parents, children and staff;
- ensure that the school is implementing effective means of recording attendance and organizing that data, including for children who are educated off-site;
- ensure that they are clear on how to analyze attendance data and how to communicate the findings effectively to parents and staff;
- ensure that senior leaders make the necessary referrals to the local authority and other relevant agencies in individual cases of non-attendance
- use any data gathered to devise solutions to problems, make the proper adjustments to attendance coordination and target set for the future.

5.2 School leadership team

As part of ACS' whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, the school leadership team will:

- be active in their approach to promoting good attendance to students and their parents, which includes forming positive relationships with families;
- ensure that the school's teaching and learning experiences encourage regular attendance and that students are taught the value of high attendance for their own progression and achievement;
- coordinate with the governing body to monitor the implementation of the attendance policy and its effectiveness, with an annual full review;
- ensure that all staff are up to date with the school's attendance process, legislation and government guidance, and that staff are fully trained to recognize and deal with attendance issues;
- ensure that legislation and government guidance on attendance is complied with and that they (the leadership team) are up to date with any legislative changes and how to implement them;
- ensure that systems to record and report attendance data are in place and working effectively;
- develop and engage with multi-agency relationships to help with poor attendance and support families who are having difficulties getting their child to attend;
- document any specific interventions or steps taken to work with families to improve their child's attendance in case of future legal proceedings.

5.3 School attendance officers

Heads of School must identify staff whose responsibilities must include:

- following up on all student absences promptly
- monitoring and analyzing attendance data
- send attendance notices to parents
- work with school Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) to provide accurate information to parents when children are persistently absent
- providing regular attendance reports to school staff and reporting concerns about attendance to the designated senior leader responsible for attendance
- keep accurate and timely records
- notify school leaders, pastoral support staff, and safeguarding teams of urgent or chronic attendance concerns as defined in the Student-Parent Handbook
- gather and record information about students transferring from ACS:
    - the date the student left for another school
    - the name of the new school
    - the date when the student is due to start attending their new school
- When students transfer in or out during the school year,
    - register the transfer in NSIS
- Enter the information into ACS's Student Information System and NSIS
    - the date the student left for another school
    - the name of the new school
    - the date the student is due to start attending their new school

5.4 Teachers and support staff

As part of ACS' whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, the school's teachers and support staff will:

- be active in their approach to promoting good attendance to students and their parents, which includes forming positive relationships with families;
- ensure that the school's teaching and learning experiences encourage regular attendance and that students are taught the value of high attendance for their own personal progression and achievement;
- ensure that they are fully aware and up to date with the school's attendance process, legislation and government guidance, and that they will speak to another member of staff or seek support if they are unsure how to deal with an attendance issue;
- ensure that they are following the correct systems for recording attendance and that attendance is taken daily;

- use the school's Learning Management Systems in line with agreed expectations, which can support students who are absent
- contribute to strategy meetings and interventions where they are needed;
- work with external agencies to support students and their families who are struggling with regular attendance.

5.5 Parents

As part of ACS' whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, we request that parents:

- engage with their children's education – support their learning and take an interest in what they have been doing at school;
- promote the value of good education and the importance of regular school attendance at home;
- encourage and support their children's aspirations;
- follow the set school procedure for reporting the absence of their child from school, and include an expected date for return;
- do everything they can to prevent unnecessary school absences, such as making medical and dental appointments outside school hours;
- use the school as a support when they or their child are having difficulties, and work to form a positive relationship with the school so that there is easy communication when a problem arises;
- keep the school informed of any circumstances which may affect their child's attendance;
- enforce a regular routine at home in terms of homework, bedtime, etc. so that the child is used to consistency and the school day becomes part of that routine. It is vital that the child receives the same message at home as they do at school about the importance of attendance;
- understand that family staff must always be directed by and inform parents (who remain legally responsible for their children beyond school grounds) of changes in transportation
- not take their children out of school for holidays during term time. If parents would like to make a special request for this, they may do so to the Head of School or division principal.

5.6 Students

As part of ACS' whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, we expect that students make every effort to:

- be aware of the school's attendance rules, and when and what they are required to attend. This will be communicated to them through the school staff, parents and the school timetable;
- speak to their homeroom teacher or another member of staff if they are experiencing difficulties at school or at home which may impact on their attendance;
- attend all lessons ready to learn, with the appropriate learning tools requested and on time for the class. Lesson times will be made clear through their school timetable;
- bring a note of explanation from their parents or doctor to explain an absence that has happened or is foreseen to receive consideration for having the absence excused;
- follow the correct set school procedure if they arrive late. Students are held responsible for this, and it is made clear to all students what this procedure is by their homeroom teachers. This will help the school monitor attendance and keep accurate records for the child's individual attendance and is also vital for health and safety in a school evacuation.
- use the school's Learning Management Systems and other resources for remote learning (in developmentally appropriate ways) to monitor documented content, learning engagements, assignments, and assessments that took place in the absence.

6 Categories of Absence and Procedure for Reporting Absences

6.1 Absences will be treated as unauthorized unless a satisfactory explanation for the student's absence is given to the school. Parents cannot authorize absences.

6.2 Staff will make it clear on the school register when taking attendance whether a child's absence is authorized or unauthorized. Where staff have concerns regarding absences, they should follow the school's safeguarding procedures.

6.3 Attendance in all ACS registers including online registration will be recorded using the approved codes (see Appendix 2).

ACS is committed to its duty of recording at every attendance taking whether every student is

- Present;
- Attending an approved educational activity;
- Absent; or,
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

6.4 ACS is committed to its duty to follow up absences to:

- Ensure the appropriate safeguarding action is taken;

- Identify whether the absence is approved;
- Identify the correct code before entering it in the attendance system; and
- Log any subsequent changes absence codes after an initial re-coding from 'Ab'

6.5 When a child is to be absent from school without prior permission, parents should inform the school on the first day of absence no later than 9:30am, the reason for absence, and what date they expect the child to return. This should be followed up with a written note from the parent of the child. Alternative arrangements will be made individually for parents requiring translation services.

6.6 Illness (physical and mental health-related)

6.6.1 Most cases of absence due to illness are short term, but parents will need to alert the school on *each day* of absence. When the child returns to school, they should bring a note from their parents explaining the absence or may be required to provide a medical excuse by the school. Absences at the time of a summative assessment will require a medical note.

6.6.2 For prolonged absence due to illness, parents may be asked to provide the school with medical evidence such as a note from the child's doctor, an appointment card or a prescription paper.

6.6.3 For an extended absence for mental health (anxiety or other social, emotional or mental health concerns exceeding three days), the divisional principal must be notified, along with the school counsellor and (D)DSL. Absence for mental health concerns that involves more than 3 days consecutively or 5 days within a semester requires a safeguarding risk assessment entered in My Concern.

6.6.4 ACS promotes school attendance as a major component of students' mental wellbeing, being mindful of mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools. In very exceptional circumstances, where it is in a student's best interests, a coordinated plan may involve the use of a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs, in collaboration with mental health professionals. We will provide reasonable accommodation that encourages regular attendance for the full school day.

6.6 Medical or dental appointments

6.71 Parents should make every effort to ensure these appointments are made outside school hours. Where it cannot be avoided, children should attend school for as much of that day as possible.

6.8 Bereavement

6.8.1 The school may authorize absence for a family bereavement, at the discretion of the Head of School. We recognize that travel may require additional absence in the context of our international community. The school may limit bereavement to 5 days maximum in a given school year for immediate family losses.

6.9 Suspension (temporary exclusion)

6.9.1 Suspension (temporary exclusion) is treated as an authorized absence. The students' single point of contact will arrange for work to be sent home or completed on their return, where appropriate.

6.10 Family holidays and extended leave

6.10.1 Parents must ensure that family holidays and extended leave are arranged outside of school term time. In exceptional circumstances, parents may request a leave of absence during term time from the Head of School or division principal.

6.10.2 Requests for exceptional leave must be made in writing to the Head of School or division principal at least 14 days (about 2 weeks) in advance. Retrospective applications will not be considered. The Head of School may only authorize student absences in exceptional circumstances. The Head of School's decision is final.

6.10.3 All requests for authorized absence will be responded to in writing and will outline the details of when the child is expected to return to school. Parents should contact the school immediately if there is any change in the approved date of return.

6.10.4 Unauthorised absences may subject parents to further action by the school.

6.11 Religious observance

6.11.1 ACS recognizes that families celebrate holidays and honor commitments as part of their communities of faith which do not coincide with ACS school holidays; Heads of school will allow authorized absence for religious observances.

6.11.2 Parents will be aware of these dates and must give the school written notification in advance.

6.12 Study leave

6.12.1 The school has a period of study leave leading up to certain examinations where students are granted authorized absence to revise at home. The school operates study sessions at school within this time to help with revision and to reduce the amount of time spent out of school.

6.13 Late arrival

6.13.1 The School Day begins at 7:30 AM daily. Students who arrive after this time but within the registration period will be marked as late. The registration period ends at 7:50 AM.

6.13.2 Divisional handbooks at each campus set out the procedures for signing in when students are late arriving to school (i.e. after 7:30 AM). Students arriving late must be signed in at their divisional office and a reason given for their lateness. Any unjustifiable reason for absence will be marked as unauthorized. It is vital that students sign in at the office to ensure that appropriate health and safety regulations are followed and that all students are accounted for.

6.13.3 In Middle and High School settings, a register is also taken at the start of all lessons by the subject teacher, and any unexplained absences reported back to the school office. If a student is late to a lesson, this will be recorded on the register.

6.13.4 Persistent lateness may result in disciplinary action.

7 School action: following up absences

7.1 Class registers are passed to the school office at the end of the registration period. Electronic registers are considered equivalent to ink registers.

7.2 Where there are unexplained or unauthorized absences, ACS will contact the parents. If a pattern of unauthorized absences emerges, the principal or other appropriate person will contact the parent to discuss possible reasons and school or community-based support systems that could help.

7.3 Parents will be contacted if a student gives a reason for an unauthorized absence that appears false or that gives rise to doubt.

7.4 Upon a student's return from absence, divisional offices will require students to provide a written explanation for the absence from their parents. This is for the school records and is necessary no matter what the reason or length of the absence.

7.5 Upon a student's return from absence, the school will support that student when they re-enter school to help them catch up on any work that they have missed from authorized absences.

7.6 Where a student has been absent from school for a period of more than 30 school days, and where the absence was unauthorized and both the school and Local Authority have been unable to contact the parents, the school may remove the child from the school roll.

7.7 ACS may take disciplinary action against any students who are discovered to be persistently truanting, and parents may be contacted to discuss possible reasons and MOEHE.

8 Non-attendance Consequences

8.1. Promotion. In unusual circumstances of prolonged absence, the school reserves the right to require a student to retake courses or to repeat a year. More unusually, the student may not be re-enrolled for the next academic year.

8.2 Award of credit. Where a student has attendance below 90% within a particular subject, they will receive a failing grade, and no credit is awarded.

8.2.1. Credit recovery. Credit recovery programs for unexcused absences are not allowed.

9 Associated Policies

9.1 This policy is associated with and should be read in conjunction with the following ACS policies:

- Admissions and Continuing Enrolment Policy (Doha)
- Behavior Policy
- Exclusion Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Student Mental Health Policy

9.2. ACS guidance is available for developing learning plans for students with an excused absence or disciplinary consequence that removes them from school.

Appendix 1

Doha Attendance Codes

_	Present
RP	Remotely Present
C	Excused Absence - with authorization (incl Visa or QID issues)
O	Not physically present in school
I	Student is sick
X	Not required to be in school
UA	Unexcused absence (absent for unauthorized reason)
Ab	Student not in class (parent should be contacted for reason)
MA	Medical/dental appointment
FA	Family or personal business- includes religious and immigration reasons
SA	School related absence-includes field trips, disciplinary suspensions and study leave
UT	Unexcused Tardy
ET	Excused Tardy
FEM	Fire Evacuation Missing
EL	Early Leavers
AL	Asynchronous Learning