



St Mary's Catholic Primary School Attendance Policy

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INTRODUCTION

Working together to improve attendance 2024:

Section 1: The importance of school attendance

7. *Improving attendance is everyone's business. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families. The foundation of securing good attendance is that school is a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn.*

8. *Some pupils find it harder than others to attend school and therefore at all stages of improving attendance, schools and partners should work with pupils and parents to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place. Securing good attendance cannot therefore be seen in isolation, and effective practices for improvement will involve close interaction with schools' efforts on curriculum, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, pastoral and mental health and wellbeing, and effective use of resources, including pupil premium. It cannot solely be the preserve of a single member of staff, or organisation, it must be a concerted effort across all teaching and non-teaching staff in school, the trust or governing body, the local authority, and other local partners.*

The law on school attendance and right to a full-time education

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

This is essential for pupils to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances. The pupils with the highest attainment at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 4 have higher rates of attendance over the key stage compared to those with the lowest attainment. At KS2, pupils not meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths had an overall absence rate of 4.7%, compared to 3.5% among those meeting the expected standard. Moreover, the overall absence rate of pupils not meeting the expected standard was higher than among those meeting the higher standard (4.7% compared to 2.7%).

For the most vulnerable pupils, regular attendance is also an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided. Research has shown associations between regular absence from school and a number of extra-familial harms. This includes crime (90% of young offenders had been persistently absent)³ and serious violence (83% of knife possession offenders had been persistently absent in at least 1 of the 5 years of study).

Working together to improve attendance

Successfully treating the root causes of absence and removing barriers to attendance, at home, in school or more broadly requires schools and local partners to work collaboratively with, not against families. All partners should work together to:

MONITOR

Rigorously use attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched.

EXPECT

Aspire to high standards of attendance from all pupils and parents and build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn by prioritising attendance improvement across the school.

LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND

When a pattern is spotted, discuss with pupils and parents to listen to understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.

FACILITATE SUPPORT

Remove barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.

FORMALISE SUPPORT

Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with, partners should work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. Depending on the circumstances this may include formalising support through a parenting contract or education supervision order.

ENFORCE

Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, enforce attendance through statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education.

Through this Policy we aim to:

- Improve pupils' achievement by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality.*
- Achieve a minimum of 96% attendance for all children, apart from those with chronic health issues.*
- Create an ethos in which good attendance and punctuality are recognised as the norm and valued by all.*
- Raise awareness of parents, carers and pupils of the importance of uninterrupted attendance and punctuality at every stage of a child's education.*
- Ensure that our policy applies to Early Years aged children in order to promote good habits at an early age.*
- Work in partnership with pupils, parents, staff and the Attendance Team so that all pupils realise their potential, unhindered by unnecessary absence.*
- Promote a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which pupils feel safe, secure and valued.*
- Establish a pattern of monitoring attendance and ensure consistency in recognising*

achievement and dealing with difficulties.

- *Recognise the key role of all staff, but especially class teachers, in promoting good attendance.*

We maintain and promote good attendance and punctuality through:

- *Raising awareness of attendance and punctuality issues among all staff, parents and pupils.*
- *Ensuring that parents have an understanding of the responsibility placed on them for making sure their child attends regularly and punctually.*
- *Maintaining effective means of communication with parents, pupils, staff and governors on school attendance matters.*
- *Developing and implementing procedures for identifying, reporting and reviewing cases of poor attendance and persistent lateness.*
- *Supporting pupils who have been experiencing any difficulties at home or at school which are preventing good attendance.*
- *Developing and implementing procedures to follow up non-attendance at school.*

DEFINITIONS

Authorised absence

An absence is classified as authorised when a child has been away from school for a legitimate reason and the school has received notification from a parent or carer. Only the headteacher can authorise an absence. Parents do not have this authority. Consequently, not all absences supported by parents will be classified as authorised.

Unauthorised absence

An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of the school. Therefore the absence is unauthorised if a child is away from school without good reason, even with the support of a parent.

PROCEDURES

Our school has the following procedures in place to support good attendance:

- Registers are maintained appropriately and completed at the start of each session.
- Attendance data is maintained appropriately which details any absences or lateness.
- First-day absence procedures are in place to ensure all children are safe and attending school regularly.
- Attendance procedures and expectations are communicated to all staff, governors, parents and pupils.
- Persistent absences and lateness is followed up.
- Not authorising family holidays taken during term time.
- Working with parents to improve individual pupils attendance and punctuality.
- Working with County Attendance Team to support any child whose attendance causes concern and where parents/carers have not responded to school initiatives to improve.
- Report attendance statistics to Buckinghamshire LA and the DfE where requested.

RESPONSIBILITIES

All members of school staff have a responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and punctuality.

Class teacher

Class teachers are responsible for:

- Maintaining accurate registers at the start of each session.
- Informing the Senior Leadership Team/Attendance Officer where there are concerns and acting upon them
- Emphasising with their class the importance of good attendance and promptness
- Contacting families who have been absent for more than 2 days to check in and support
- Discussing attendance issues at consultation evenings where necessary

Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- Overall monitoring of school attendance.
- Identifying trends in authorised and unauthorised absence.
- Meeting regularly with the Attendance Officer to analyse attendance.

Attendance Officer

The Attendance Officer is responsible for:

- Collating and recording registration and attendance information.
- Taking and noting recorded messages from parents regarding absence.
- Contacting parents of absent children where no contact has been made and informing HT / DSL where no contact is received.
- Recording details of children who arrive late or go home using Inventory.
- Contacting families where concerns are raised about absence including arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues.
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised.
- Making referrals to the County Attendance Team.
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence.
- Providing attendance / punctuality reports to the Headteacher on a weekly basis
- Monitoring attendance.
- Sending out standard letters regarding attendance.

Parents

Parents/Carers are responsible for:

- Ensuring their child attends school regularly and punctually unless prevented from doing so by illness.
- Contacting the school office daily, before 8:30am, on each day of absence.
- Wherever possible, making medical appointments outside of school hours and in any case, informing the school in advance of any medical appointments in school time. For the absence to be recorded as a medical absence we do require evidence from the doctor or dentist. (Appointment card/letter)
- Talking to the school as soon as possible about any child's reluctance to come to school so that problems can be quickly identified and dealt with.

REGISTRATION

- St Mary's operates a 'soft-start' and therefore the school doors open at 8:30am.
- The school day begins and registers are taken at 8:45am. After this time, children must enter the school via the school office.
- Registers close at 9am. Any child who arrives after the register has been taken but before 9am is recorded as 'late before the register closed' (L). Any child arriving after 9am, must be accompanied to the school office to be signed in. They will be recorded as 'late after the register closed' (U). For the purposes of school registers, this is counted as an absence for the session.
- All registers are completed electronically and recorded in the SIMS management system.

CONTACT EVERY DAY

Where a child is absent from school and we have not received any verbal or written communication from the parent, then we initiate the contact process. Office staff check all of the registers from 9.00am to 9.30am on a daily basis, to identify those pupils who are absent. There are occasions when we are unaware why the child is absent and we will contact the parent to check the reasons for the child's absence.

PARENTAL REQUEST FOR ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL FOR HOLIDAY

Holidays will not be authorised and parents should not under any circumstances make travel arrangements during term time without discussing it with the Head Teacher first. Parents needing leave of absence for exceptional circumstances should make a request in writing.

Unauthorised leave during term time

A new National Framework for Penalty Notices is being introduced. The regulations will come into effect from the 19th of August 2024. The aim is to improve consistency in the use of penalty notices across England.

The national framework includes:

- A single consistent national threshold for when a penalty notice must be considered of 10 sessions (usually equivalent to 5 school days) for any unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period. The 10 week period may span different terms or

school years. For example, 2 sessions of unauthorised absence in the summer term and a further 8 within the autumn term.

If you take your child out of school for an accumulative total of 5 days or more (10 sessions) (90%) over a period of 10 weeks, the school will deem this as irregular attendance and will consider a referral to the Local authority for consideration of legal action. This could include:

- a Penalty Notice payable up to £160 fine
- prosecution under s444 (1) Education Act 1996, where if convicted you may be fined up to £1,000
- prosecution under s444 (1) (a) Education Act 1996 where if convicted you may be fined up to £2,500 and/or 3 months' imprisonment

A national limit of 2 penalty notices that can be issued to a parent for the same child within a rolling 3 year period, so at the 3rd (or subsequent) offence(s) another tool must be considered (such as prosecution or another attendance legal interventions).

ADDRESSING ATTENDANCE CONCERNS

The school expects attendance of at least 96%.

It is the responsibility of the Headteacher and the governors to support good attendance and to identify and address attendance concerns promptly. Initially concerns about attendance are raised with parents via letters which are sent home, or telephone calls from the Attendance Officer. There will be opportunities for the parent/carer to discuss reasons for absence and support to be given by the school with the aim to improve attendance. Where a child's attendance is below 90%, they will be monitored through a 5-week attendance contract, if attendance does not improve over the initial contract, a second 5-week contract will be entered. The school will then have a responsibility to make a referral to the County Attendance Team where a satisfactory improvement is not made. The County Attendance Team may issue penalty notices to parents where poor attendance patterns continue despite support from the school and County Team.

ATTENDANCE PROMISE

Teachers will call home to offer support on missed lessons for pupils who have been absent for 2+days

Work packs can be arranged for pupils who are absent due to special circumstances, such as recovery from a fracture/operation/isolation. Work will not be sent home for pupils who are absent due to illness.

ATTENDANCE – WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR YOUR CHILD?

Above 96%	Excellent! A pupil with attendance of 96%+ is more likely to be successful in school and reach their full potential. You are giving your child the very best opportunity to succeed in school.
90-95%	Even with an attendance level of 95%, up to 60 lessons could have been missed. A pupil with an attendance of 90% at the end of the school year will have missed 4 weeks' worth of school. Please monitor your child's attendance carefully.
Below 90%	An attendance of 85% is 6 weeks of education missed over the year. Pupils are at serious risk of falling behind. Pupils below 85% are missing a substantial amount of school, more than a half term of absence, having a serious impact on their ability to reach their full potential. Individual pupils will be identified by the Department of Education as a persistent absentee. Attendance will be monitored.

