

# *Weston Park Primary School*



## **Attendance Policy**

Date of last review: March 2017

Date of next review: March 2019

# ATTENDANCE POLICY

## Vision

We recognise that regular school attendance is key to good pupil outcomes. The links between regular attendance, reaching potential attainment and future life opportunities are well researched. For this reason the school will encourage good attendance, be robust in monitoring attendance and take action when attendance fails.

Absence can be a symptom of:

- Wider safeguarding issues - domestic violence, hidden harm etc
- Low aspirations and/or disaffection
- Generational trends
- Economic climate
- Health or medical needs
- Lack of regard of the importance of regular attendance

## Aims

- To maximise our attendance rates by encouraging, recognising and rewarding good attendance.
- To investigate individual absences and ensure that pupils and parents are clear that unauthorised absences are not acceptable.
- To work closely with pupils and parents, along with other professional agencies, to help them overcome problems which may prevent pupils from attending regularly.

## The Legal Framework

Parents are responsible for ensuring that children receive an appropriate education. It is the responsibility of the school to support attendance and to support any issues which may lead to non-attendance.

Penalty Notices may be issued under the Local Authority's (LA) Code of Conduct for the use of Penalty Notices in Cases of Non-Attendance at School. A copy of this Code of Conduct can be obtained from the school's Attendance Officer or the Education Welfare Service.

## Monitoring Pupil Attendance

Attendance is monitored on a twice daily basis. Parents of pupils who are absent without explanation will be contacted mid-morning via the school's text messaging service or by telephone. We operate a 'first day contact policy' in relation to pupil's absence. Parents should expect to be contacted on the first day of their child's absence.

Upon return to school, parents must provide a letter of explanation for the absence if a satisfactory reason has not already been discussed with the School Office. Those pupils whose attendance is causing concern may be asked to provide medical notes for absence and the school nurse may be contacted.

The authorisation of any absence is at the Headteacher's discretion. If the legitimacy of the absence due to illness is in doubt, the school reserves the right not to authorise the absence and to request parents to provide medical evidence. With parents' permission, the school may also contact the pupil's GP.

In the case of those pupils whose level of attendance is causing concern, the Attendance Officer will send home letters and a copy of the child's attendance to date. In some cases, the school may choose to meet with parents or conduct a home visit. If there is no improvement the pupil will be referred to the Education Welfare Service.

All unauthorised absence will put parents at risk of being issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice, or of legal proceedings being instigated for failing to ensure their child's attendance at school.

### **Strategies to Encourage Good Attendance**

We believe that pupils who achieve good attendance should be recognised and rewarded; thus providing them with positive reinforcement and providing other pupils with further incentives to improve their attendance.

Rewards are issued for excellent attendance weekly and half termly, both for individuals and class groups. Recognition can be made through:

- Personal congratulations from the Attendance Officer or members of the Senior Leadership Team.
- Letters home.
- Prizes for the best class attendance in each year group, awarded half termly and termly.
- Individual awards for good attendance, awarded half termly, termly and for the year.

Positive messages about good attendance are shared in class time, assemblies and meetings with parents. Up-to-date attendance data is always available from the school office.

### **Parents' Responsibilities**

- Parents have a legal responsibility to send their children to school regularly.
- It is the parents' responsibility to inform the school of the reason for a child's absence as soon as possible, ideally before 8:45am.
- Parental contact should be made by telephone on the first day of absence.
- Unless agreed in advance with a member of staff parents should contact the school on each day of absence.
- Parents should arrange non-emergency medical appointments outside of school hours.
- Parents should resolve any in-school problems with the appropriate member of staff without any adverse effect on attendance.
- Parents should discuss any problems with the school at the earliest opportunity so that a joint effort can be made to address them.
- The School Prospectus, website, newsletters and newsletters provide the parents with details of our expectations.

### **Interventions to Address Poor Attendance**

We employ a range of strategies to address the problems of pupils who have unacceptably low levels of attendance. The Attendance Officer and Designated Safeguarding Leaders work together to identify those at risk. The school keeps detailed records of concerns and regularly analyses the data in order to target resources. Early intervention is the key. Strategies include telephone calls, letters home and meetings with the child and/or parents in school.

Following these initial interventions and if the problem has still not been successfully dealt with, the pupil's case will be referred to the Education Welfare Service. We work closely with the Education Welfare Service to support the pupil and parents and work together to agree a suitable action plan to improve attendance.

All cases where attendance falls below 90% will be discussed with the Educational Welfare Officer.

As a final measure, where the non-attendance of a pupil is not solved the Local Authority (LA) will seek legal advice and may pursue legal action to enforce attendance through the courts.

Where there have been issues of long-term absence we work closely with the Education Welfare Officer and parents to ensure the pupil is re-integrated back into school at the earliest opportunity.

The Local Authority convenes annual attendance conferences and network meetings and is working closely with Health Service professionals to improve attendance across the city.

### **Fixed Penalty Notices**

Fixed Penalty Notices were introduced by Southampton City Council in September 2005 as an alternative to prosecution. All students who have 10 sessions of unauthorised attendance (i.e. 5 days) may be liable for a fixed penalty notice.

A full copy of the Local Authority's Code of Conduct for the use of Penalty Notices in Cases of Non-Attendance at School can be obtained from the school or the Education Welfare Service.

### **The Importance of Registration**

All schools are required to maintain an attendance register in which, at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session, pupils are marked present or absent. Absence must also be denoted as authorised or unauthorised.

It is essential that the registers are accurate and secure.

### Registration and Punctuality

In order to receive a present mark, pupils should arrive in time to attend morning registration.

Pupils who arrive after the registration (8:55am) must report to the main reception desk to sign in.

Latecomers, who arrive after morning registration but before the register closes, will be marked present, indicated with an 'L'. Latecomers who arrive after the register has closed will be marked present with a 'U' code. Statistically this code counts as an unauthorised absence for the session.

The school will take action to address persistent lateness and this action could include referral to the Education Welfare Service. Persistent lateness also places parents at risk of a Fixed Penalty Notice being issued.

### Leave of absence

We will not automatically authorise leave of absence.

*There is no automatic entitlement for leave of absence during term time.*

The Headteacher will consider each request on its merits **but authorised absence during term time will only be agreed in exceptional circumstances.** The most important considerations are:

- Whether the absence could be taken during periods of normal school holidays.
- Whether the student is subject to any assessments during the academic year concerned and achievement may be adversely affected.
- Whether due consideration has been given to the timing of the leave of absence e.g. at the start of a new term.
- The pupil's current level of attendance.
- No authorised absence will be given during assessment periods; this will include all siblings within the family.

Parents must apply in writing to the Headteacher **at least three weeks** in advance of the requested leave of absence. An application form is available from the school office which, once considered, will be returned to the parent indicating whether or not the period of leave has been agreed. Parents may be asked to come into school to meet with members of staff before a final decision is made.

In cases where overseas travel has been booked in advance of a request, the school may request sight of travel documentation and where no return travel arrangements have been made, the pupil may be removed from the school roll on the last day of their attendance.

Parents should be aware that all siblings' attendance should be above 95% in order for any leave of absence to be agreed. If one sibling is below the 95% requirement, the absence will automatically be refused, unless in exceptional circumstances.

*Any requests for leave of absence that have not been agreed by the school, but are subsequently taken will put parents at risk of a Penalty Notice or prosecution.*

In cases where a leave of absence request is declined the school will record the absence using an "O" code in the register which denotes an unauthorised absence.

### **Truancy**

EWOs and the Police conduct truancy sweeps throughout the city. Pupils may be brought back to school and letters sent to parents. Those conducting the sweep may visit the pupil's home if they are absent without explanation.

Pupils identified on truancy sweeps, or returned to school by the Police having been caught truancying, place their parent(s) at risk of a Fixed Penalty Notice being issued.

In cases where a parent has contacted the school and reported their child to be absent due to sickness and the absence has been authorised, but the pupil is subsequently identified on a truancy sweep, or, the pupil is returned to school by the Police, the school reserve the right to de-authorise the absence. This would then place parents at risk of a Fixed Penalty Notice being issued or legal proceedings being instigated, as the absence would be unauthorised.

If a parent has reported their child absent due to sickness, the parent is responsible for ensuring that their child remains at home during school hours, unless visiting the Doctor's surgery.

### **Education Welfare Service Referrals**

We work closely with the Education Welfare Service to support pupils whose attendance is causing concern. This includes the reintegration into school of pupils with long term absence. The Education Welfare Officer may instigate home visits and, therefore, will be able to assess a non-attender's problems in the wider family context, offering advice and solutions where possible.

### **School Attendance Policy**

This policy is monitored as a matter of course by those responsible for its day-to-day operation and is reviewed bi-annually.

### **Criteria for Success**

- Attendance rate increases.
- Authorised absence rate decreases.
- Unauthorised absence rate decreases.
- Improvement in individuals' attendance.
- Good attendance has a high profile within the school community.