

# Attendance and Absence Policy

Review Date: Spring 2022

Reviewed by: Governor Children & Learning Committee

Next review date: Spring 2025



## Introduction

Central to raising standards in education and ensuring that all pupils can fulfil their potential is an assumption so widely understood that it is insufficiently stated – **pupils need to attend school regularly to benefit from their education**. Missing out on lessons leaves children vulnerable to falling behind. Children with poor attendance tend to achieve less in both primary and secondary schools.

### **The Government expects:**

#### **Schools and Local Authorities to**

- Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence;
- Ensure every child has access to full-time education to which they are entitled; *and*,
- Act early to address patterns of absences

**Parents** to perform their legal duty by ensuring their children of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend regularly

**All pupils** to be punctual to their lessons.

*DfE September 2018*

## Aims

Regular and punctual school attendance is important. Pupils need to attend school regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them by law. Meldreth Primary School fully recognises its responsibilities to ensure pupils are in school and on time, therefore having access to learning for the maximum number of days and hours.

Our policy applies to all children registered at this school and this policy is made available to all parents/carers of pupils who are registered at our school on our school website.

This policy has been written to adhere to the relevant Children Acts, Education Acts, Regulations and Guidance from the Department for Education in addition to guidance from the Local Authority.

Although parents/carers have the legal responsibility for ensuring their child's good attendance, the Headteacher and Governors at our school work together with other professionals and agencies to ensure that all pupils are encouraged and supported to develop good attendance habits. Procedures in this policy are followed to ensure this happens.

## 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. For example, if a child has been unwell and the parent telephones the school to explain the absence.
- Only the school can make an absence authorised. 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 will undertake to follow the following procedures to support good attendance:
- To maintain appropriate registration processes.
- To maintain appropriate attendance data.
- To communicate clearly the attendance procedures and expectations to all staff, governors, parents and pupils.
- To have consistent and systematic daily records which give detail of any absence and lateness.
- To follow up absences and persistent lateness if parents/carers have not communicated with the school.
- To inform parents/carers what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absence.
- To strongly discourage unnecessary absence through holidays taken during term time.
- To work with parents to improve individual pupils attendance and punctuality
- To refer to the Attendance Team at Cambridgeshire County Council any child whose attendance causes concern and where parents/carers have not responded to school initiatives to improve.
- To report attendance statistics to Cambridgeshire LA and the DfE where requested.
- All staff should be aware that they must raise any attendance or punctuality concerns to the Leadership Team with responsibility for monitoring attendance.

## **Responsibilities**

All members of school staff have a responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and punctuality. The following includes a more specific list of the kinds of responsibilities which individuals might have.

### **Class teachers are responsible for:**

- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/ carers
- Informing the Leadership Team where there are concerns and acting upon them
- Providing background information to support referrals
- Monitoring follow-up once actions have been taken to correct attendance concerns
- Emphasising with their class the importance of good attendance and promptness
- Following up absences with immediate requests for explanation which should be noted inside the register
- Discussing attendance issues at consultation evenings where necessary

### **The Headteacher is responsible for:**

- Overall monitoring of school attendance
- Trends in authorised and unauthorised absence
- 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 Education Welfare service
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion with the school's EWO
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence.

### **Staff in the School Office are responsible for:**

- Collating and recording registration and attendance information.
- Taking and recording messages from parents regarding absence
- Ensuring the Absence/Late Book is completed
- Contacting parents of absent children where no contact has been made.
- Recording details of children who arrive late or go home
- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/ carers and reporting concerns to the Headteacher
- Sending out standard letters regarding attendance

### **Parents/Carers are responsible for:**

- Ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually unless prevented from doing so by illness or attendance at a medical appointment.
- Contacting the school office on the first morning of absence.
- 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)
- Making requests for authorised absence in term time giving 2 weeks notice, only if absolutely necessary as these are not automatically authorised.
- 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.

## **Attendance Registers**

Under the Education Regulations 1995, the Governing Body is responsible for ensuring that the school keeps accurate attendance registers. At Meldreth Primary School, attendance registers record the attendance of children who are present at the start of both the morning and afternoon session each day. They also record whether an absence is authorised or unauthorised. These are kept on our management information system for 3 years after the pupil leaves school.

## **Attendance and Parental Responsibility**

Children are expected to attend school for 190 days each year. One day counts as a morning and an afternoon session, a total of 380 sessions per year.

Parent/ Carers are responsible for making sure that children of compulsory school age receive a suitable full-time education. A child reaches compulsory school age on or after their fifth birthday. If they turn five between 1 January and 31 March they are of compulsory age on 31 March; if they turn five between 1 April and 31 August they are of compulsory school age on 31 August; if they turn five between 1 September and 31 December, then they are of compulsory school age on 31 December.

## **Registration**

**Children are expected to arrive in school between 8.40am and 8.45am.** This time is sufficient for all pupils to come into their classroom where a starter activity provided by their class teacher. During this time, attendance registers are taken by the class teacher.

**Each class teacher has the responsibility for keeping an accurate record of attendance.** Any pupil who is absent must be recorded at the beginning of the morning and afternoon session. **The attendance register must be completed by the class teacher by 8.50am and by 1.10pm.** (Attendance code / and \ for pupils who are present) These registers are then returned to the school office.

All attendance records are documented using SIMs software, which is supported by the Local Authority. Attendance registers are legal documents and these must be kept secure and preserved for a period of three years after the date they were last used.

## **Lateness**

The gate is closed at 8.50am any pupil who comes into school after this time will be marked as late in the attendance record. Electronic records are kept of those pupils who are late, this is then documented on the electronic register for each pupil (Attendance code L). Any child who arrives for school later than 9.20am will be marked as having an unauthorised absence for the morning. (Attendance code U).

Children who have attended a dentist or doctor's appointment and subsequently come to school later than 9.05am will have the absence recorded as a medical absence (Attendance code M).

Children who are persistently late miss a significant amount of learning, often the most important aspect, as the beginning of the day is where the teacher explains the learning and what each child is expected to achieve.

Where there have been persistent incidents of lateness parents/carers will receive a letter advising them of the concerns and the school will provide opportunities for parents/carers to seek support and advice to address these issues.

## **Absences**

Parents/carers should contact the school on the first day of their child's absence. When parents/carers notify us of their child's absence it is important that they provide us with details of the reason for their absence.

Class teachers are responsible for monitoring attendance in their class. If they are aware of any unexpected absence during the school day, they will alert the school office and/or Headteacher as soon as possible.

All absences are recorded as either authorised or unauthorised absences on the computer. It is important that we receive accurate information from parents with reasons for the child's absence. This information is used to determine whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised. The Headteacher has the responsibility to determine whether absences are authorised or unauthorised.

Where we have not received reasons for a child's absence then we send a letter requesting these details to parents/carers to complete. If this letter is not completed and returned by the specified date then the absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence (Attendance Code O)

## **First Day Contact**

Where a child is absent from school and we have not received any verbal or written communication from the parent, then we initiate a first day 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. The answer machine (01763 260432) is checked daily for absence messages alternatively parents may also e-mail the office with this information [office@meldreth.cambs.sch.uk](mailto:office@meldreth.cambs.sch.uk).

## **Illness**

No child should attend school until 48 hours after they have suffered sickness and/or diarrhoea.

Every effort should be made to arrange dental/ medical appointments out of school hours. If this is not possible, children should be returned to school as soon as possible after the appointment. Parent/carers are required to sign their child(ren) in and out of school at the school office in the Medical/ Dental Appointments folder.

When children have an illness that means they will be away from school long term, the school will do all it can to send material home, so that they can keep up with their school work.

If the absence is likely to continue for an extended period, or be a repetitive absence, the school will contact the support services to see if arrangements can be made for the child to be given some home tuition outside school.

Where over the course of an academic year, a child has repeated periods of illness, the school will write to parents to ask them to provide medical evidence for each future period of illness related absence. This evidence could be a Doctor's note, appointment card or copy of a prescription. We may seek written permission from you for the school to make their own enquiries.

## **Parental Request for Absence from School for Holiday**

With effect from September 2013 the government abolished the right of Headteachers to authorise absence specifically for holidays of up to 10 days per year if special circumstances exist. Instead, Headteachers are only allowed to grant leave of absence if they are satisfied exceptional circumstances exist. If the school refuses your request and the child is still taken out of school, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. A significant amount of unauthorised absence may make you liable to a Penalty Notice for each child, payable by each parent/carer, or the subject of court proceedings, which could result in a fine of up to £2,500 and/or a term of imprisonment of up to 3 months.

For more information on Penalty Notices please see [Cambridgeshire County Council's website page on school attendance](#).

## **Addressing Attendance Concerns**

The school expects attendance of at least 95%.

It is important for children to establish good attendance habits early on in their primary school career. It is the responsibility of the Headteacher and the governors to support good attendance and to identify and address attendance concerns promptly. We rely upon parents to ensure their child attends school regularly and punctually and therefore where there are concerns regarding attendance parents are always informed of our concerns. Initially concerns about attendance are raised with parents via letters, which are sent home. 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 record does not improve over a period of time then the school has a responsibility to make a referral to the Educational Welfare Service.

The Attendance Team at Cambridgeshire County Council will issue penalty notices to parents where there has been a referral from the school as part of the school's processes to address poor attendance patterns.

In addition, education-related parenting orders are available by direct application by a school or LA to the Magistrates' Court as an ancillary order following a successful prosecution by the LA for irregular attendance or breach of a school attendance order.

The Local Authority Attendance Officer regularly supports staff in monitoring attendance to identify children with low attendance (usually below 90%). They work with the school to improve attendance and may issue fixed penalty fines if attendance support meetings held by the school do not improve attendance.

## **Monitoring Attendance**

Our office staff have the responsibility for ensuring that all of the attendance data is accurately recorded on our management information system. Regular meetings are held with the Assistant Headteacher to discuss all

attendance concerns and appropriate actions are taken following these meetings such as letters sent to parents or meetings arranged to discuss attendance concerns with parents.

Should a child's attendance fall below 90% in a six week period then this is classed as persistent absence. All absence is followed up by the school initially. Sometimes, absence may involve the support and intervention of the Local Authority Attendance Officer.

If a pattern of absence or regular absences emerge, during monitoring, you will receive a letter from the Headteacher (attendance falling below 95%) outlining the concerns. You will be invited in to school to discuss this with the Headteacher and to agree targets. A record of this meeting will be kept on your child's file.

Should there be no improvement in attendance the Local Authority Attendance Officer will become involved and this may incur a penalty; it may even incur a custodial sentence.

## **Rewards**

Headteacher awards are part of our culture of celebration. From time to time children will be rewarded for excellent attendance or good timekeeping. This may involve receipt of a special attendance certificate or a negotiated reward for the group/class/ individual with the best attendance record.

## **Monitoring and Review**

It is the responsibility of the Governing Body of Meldreth Primary School to monitor overall attendance. Regular attendance and absence figures are discussed by the Governing Body. The Governors work closely with the school to ensure that the school's attendance figures are as high as possible.

The school keeps accurate attendance records on file. Parents receive a copy of their child's annual attendance alongside the written annual report in July. Attendance records are kept on file for a minimum period of three years.

## ABSENCE REQUEST FORM (exceptional circumstances only)

I wish to apply to have an 'avoidable' absence authorised, for:

Child's name			
Class/Year			
Date from		date to(inclusive)	
Name of Parent(s)/Carer(s):			

Please fully explain the exceptional circumstances that you would like the school to consider. This section must be completed.  
Please continue on a separate sheet if needed.

I understand that leave of absence will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. Should this not be granted and I take my child/rem out of school, I am aware that I may be liable for a penalty notice as stated below.

Signature of Parent(s)/Carer(s).....

The law does not grant parents/carers an automatic right to take their children out of school during term time. If the request is for an absence in term time, you must have Parental Responsibility and be the parent/carer with whom the child normally lives. Permission must be sought in advance. If the circumstances relating to this request are considered exceptional and the absence is authorised by the school, the authorising of the absences will be conditional on the child(ren) attending satisfactory up to the date covered by this request.

Warning: If the school refuses your request and the child is still taken out of school, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. A significant amount of unauthorised absence may make you liable to a Penalty Notice for each child, payable by each parent/carer, or the subject of court proceedings which could result in a fine of up to £2,500 and/or a term of imprisonment of up to 3 months.

For more information on Penalty Notices please see [Cambridgeshire County Council's website page on school attendance](#).

Office use only

Date from	No of school days	Absence authorised	Absence unauthorised
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Signed (Headteacher)

## UNAVOIDABLE ABSENCE IN TERM-TIME

**IMPORTANT:** Please read carefully the information below.

**WARNING:** If you allow your child to miss school in term time for an avoidable reason without obtaining the prior approval of the school, you may be issued with a Penalty Notice per parent per child, or made the subject of court proceedings under section 444 Education Act 1996.

The law requires parents to ensure their children receive an efficient full time education, and every minute of every day is important. Please help them not to miss any of this valuable time. As a parent/carer, you can demonstrate your commitment to your child's education by not allowing your child to miss school for anything other than an exceptional and unavoidable reason.

We hope that when you have read this information you will consider that your child's education is too important to allow them to miss school for avoidable reasons.

### Legislative Background

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 were amended in September 2013. The amendments made clear that Head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless 'exceptional circumstances' exist. The regulations also stated that Head teachers should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if leave is granted for 'exceptional circumstances'. All references to family holidays and extended leave as well as the notional threshold of ten school days have been removed.

### Example Questions we are frequently asked:

#### What are exceptional circumstances?

Exceptional circumstances are one off events which are unavoidable, examples may include the death of a close relative, attendance at the funeral of a close family member, respite care of a looked after child or a housing crisis which prevents attendance.

#### Can the policy be applied to a family crisis, e.g. to visit a dying relative?

Each request will be considered under "Exceptional Circumstances" and the decision conveyed to parents.

#### What happens if a parent is a self-employed worker e.g. a Farmer, is an employee with fixed holiday dates, or is on a holiday rota set by their employer?

Some employment may make it difficult for families to spend time together in the six week summer holidays.

However, there are other school breaks when such family time can be used. A decision by parents not to spend time together in the other school holiday times, i.e. Christmas or Easter break, because of poor weather (for example) will not be a reason for authorising absences during the warmer school terms. Legislation no longer allows Head teachers to authorise 10 days absence from school for a term time holiday.

#### Which parent receives the fine?

Where both parents live together and have day-to-day care both will receive a fine. Any absent parent who has regular contact with the child and is named in the child's school records may receive a fine for each of

their children. This will include parents who allow their child to go on holiday with another family member or friend of the family.