



ST MARY'S CE (A) FIRST SCHOOL POLICY DOCUMENT FOR ATTENDANCE

Philosophy

This policy is to support the school, parents and carers in ensuring that children regularly attend school in order to access learning opportunities.

At St Mary's CE(A) First School, we are committed to working together to ensure all children receive the best education possible. We strive for them to do as well as they can and make progress in their learning and personal development and for this to happen, children need to be in school.

This policy aims to provide clarity for parents and guardians, so they understand what is expected of them and to assure them of our willingness to work positively with them if problems arise. As a Christian community, we value working together and helping others to achieve a goal.

Aims

- To support parents in their responsibility for ensuring that children of compulsory school age attend regularly and on time, within the school ethos of love and respect.
- To monitor attendance for authorised and unauthorised absences, in order to safeguard the welfare and safety of the pupils.
- Regular school attendance is the key to enabling children and young people to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults, who are able to realise their full potential and make a positive contribution to their community.
- All children should be in school, on time, every day that school is open, unless the reason for absence is unavoidable.

Objectives

- To register children on the school roll twice daily at the commencement of the morning session and during the afternoon session.
- To monitor punctual attendance.
- To inform parents of the need for regular attendance and the impact of absence on their child's education.

School Responsibility

- We will promote positive behaviour and attendance through the curriculum and will recognise good attendance appropriately.
- We will work with parents to resolve problems which may affect a child's attendance and will involve representatives of other agencies that work with the school. These may include the School Nurse, the Family Support Team and the Education Welfare Team where required, in order to ensure all children can benefit from consistently good punctuality and attendance. We will use the Early Help Assessment process to support this.
- We will be proactive in encouraging attendance for all pupils, ensuring parents and pupils receive information on the importance of good attendance and punctuality and will react swiftly to intervene to improve attendance of individual children, should this become a concern.
- We employ Visionary Individual Pathway Education. They are an independent education welfare company who work with the school to raise attendance and deal with welfare matters. They will communicate with you if there is an issue they can support us with. Pupil's attendance will be monitored and may be shared with VIP Education if it becomes a cause for concern. VIP Education are GDPR compliant and will not share personal data with any third party.
- Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems that arise with attendance are best resolved between the school, the parents and the child. If a child is reluctant, it is never better to cover up their absence or give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance doesn't matter and may make things worse. Permitting absence from school without a good reason is an offence by the parent.

Parent Responsibility

- Parents/Guardians have a legal duty to ensure that their children of compulsory school age attend school regularly.
- Inform school straight away if your child cannot attend and give the reason.
- Try to make medical, dental or other appointments outside the school day.
- Ensure the school is aware of any circumstances at home that may be likely to affect a child's attendance.
- Encourage good routines at home that promote a healthy lifestyle, including enough sleep.
- Talk to your child about school and let the school know if your child is worried about any issues such as difficulties with homework or friendship problems.
- Do not book holidays in term time - this will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.
- Seek advice from your GP if you are not sure how long to keep your child off school with an illness.
- Ensure school has all your up to date contact details.
- Encourage your child to enjoy school and make the most of all the opportunities available to them.

Guidelines

Registration

Schools are required by law to take an attendance register twice a day and this shows whether the pupil is present, engaged in an approved educational activity off-site, or absent. If a pupil of compulsory school age is absent, every half-day absence from school must be classified by the school as either **AUTHORISED** or **UNAUTHORISED**. Only school can authorise the absence, not parents. Therefore, information about the cause of each absence is always required.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness, medical appointments, or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no "leave" has been given. This includes:

- parents keeping children off from school unnecessarily
- truancy before or during the school day
- absences which have never been properly explained
- children who arrive to school after the close of the register
- school refusal
- holidays taken during term time that have not been authorised by the Head Teacher

When completing the register, school follow the DFE school attendance guidance to determine which relevant code to use; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>

The register will be taken twice a day, at the start of the morning and the afternoon.

Morning registration

The morning register is taken at 9am. Children arriving after the register has been taken but before 9.15am are recorded as late - L.

Registration closes at 9.15am. Children arriving at school after this time are "late - after registration closes" and this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence unless there is an acceptable reason for the lateness - U.

Afternoon registration

The afternoon register is taken at 1.15pm

If lateness is a cause for concern, the following procedures will be applied;

1. Parents will receive a letter informing of the concern.
2. The Education Welfare Officer (EWO) from VIP Education will contact Parents to further discuss and offer support and advice to improve punctuality.
3. Parents will be invited to a meeting with the EWO. The discussion held will be documented by the EWO and an action plan to improve punctuality will be agreed between Parents and the pupil during the meeting and a review date set if needed.
4. If no improvement is seen, the school may follow Staffordshire County Councils Code of Conduct for issuing penalty notices for persistent lateness. More information can be found at;

Absence

Parents whose children are experiencing difficulties should contact the school at an early stage and work together with the staff in resolving any problems. This is nearly always successful.

Alternatively, parents or pupils may wish to contact the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) from VIP Education themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. Their telephone number is available from the school office.

If a child is absent from school, we ask parents to:

- Contact the school office by 9.15am on the first morning of absence, giving a reason for their child's absence.
- Reply promptly to any request or inquiry concerning an absence.

If parents do not contact the school on the morning of the first day of absence, a member of the administration staff will try to contact them to find out the reason for absence. This ensures that the parent is aware their child is not in school enabling the parent, where necessary, to establish that their child is safe. If a reason for absence is not known, school will request the EWO from VIP Education to establish contact either by telephone, text message or a home visit may be completed.

A reason for a period of absence is always required to ensure an appropriate absence code is used. The school will contact parents who have not offered a reason and after a two-week period, will mark the absence as unauthorised if no suitable reason is provided.

Children Missing in Education

Schools have a duty by law to refer any absence of 20 days or more to Staffordshire County Council's Children Missing in Education department where they have been unable to make contact with the parent/child or have general concerns about the absence.

In order to avoid any referrals, parents are requested to inform the school if they are moving to a new house/area or country and to provide a forwarding address, contact number and the name of new school if known.

Medical Absence

Schools have the responsibility to decide whether an absence can be authorised on medical grounds. In a few cases parents may be asked to provide evidence that their child is too unwell to attend school by providing a note from a medical professional. If the school has concerns about the level of medical absence that a pupil has incurred, they will contact the parents/carers to discuss it further and to find out whether their GP or other health professional has been contacted.

If attendance does not improve, the school may request parents seek a note of explanation from the relevant health professional or may involve the school nurse. If despite the request for the note of explanation, no note is forthcoming, school may not be able to authorise absences unless satisfactory medical evidence is provided to support the pupil's inability to attend school.

Long term medical absence

The school follow the procedures set out by Staffordshire County Council "Children who are missing Education due to Health/Medical Needs" See Appendix 1

Medical and Dental Appointments

We expect parents to make medical and dental appointments for their children before or after school or during the school holidays whenever possible. If this is not possible then confirmation of the appointment will be required prior to authorising the absence. Children are expected to attend school prior to the appointment and parents expected to return their children to the school following the appointment whenever

possible.

Requests for leave of absence

Leave of absence requests, including holiday leave requests, may only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

If a parent wishes to request leave for their child for any reason they must apply in advance and in writing using the leave of absence request form which can be found in the school office. Where a child does not reside with both parents, it is the responsibility of the parent making the request to inform the other parent.

If a request for leave has not been received and we have reason to believe a pupil is on holiday, a letter will be sent to Parents requesting medical evidence. If no medical evidence can be provided the absence may be coded as unauthorised and a penalty notice request sent to the Local Authority. Parents will also be requested to attend a meeting with the Education Welfare Officer.

If an unauthorised leave of absence is taken, the school follow Staffordshire County Council's Code of Conduct for issuing penalty notices for unauthorised leave of absence. More information can be found at; <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/welfareservice/Attendance/home.aspx>

Monitoring attendance and lateness

The school aims to achieve at least 97% attendance each year. To help with this, we monitor attendance regularly. The school has established a system for monitoring attendance and lateness, the purpose and aims of which are as follows:

- To improve the overall percentage of attendance and improve pupils' punctuality at school.
- To make attendance and punctuality a high priority for all those associated with the school including pupils, parents, staff, and governors.
- To provide support, advice and guidance to parents and pupils.
- To develop a systematic approach to gathering and analysing attendance and punctuality related data.
- To develop and implement an effective system of communication between school and home.
- To reward good attendance and punctuality.
- To work effectively with the Local Authority and other agencies that support attendance and punctuality

Our Independent Education Welfare Officer from VIP Education regularly monitors pupil's attendance that fall below the school's annual attendance target. Where there appears to be a particular problem with attendance, the following procedures are applied;

- A letter is sent to parents informing them of a decline in school attendance and the need for this to improve due to the impact on the pupil's education
- If school attendance continues to decline, a further concern letter is sent to parents
- If still no improvement seen, parents and pupils will be invited into a meeting with the Education Welfare Officer to discuss the concerns and to offer support around any possible barriers or problems at home or at school which may be contributing to poor school attendance. The discussion held will be documented by the EWO and an action plan to improve school attendance will be devised with parents and pupil during the meeting and a review date set if needed.
- If school attendance does not improve, the school may follow Staffordshire County Councils Code of Conduct for issuing penalty notices for persistent absence. More information can be found at; <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/welfareservice/Attendance/home.aspx>

Circumstances where a Penalty Notice may be issued

Parents/carers have the legal responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly and on time, properly dressed, with the correct equipment and ready to learn. Parents may be prosecuted if a child does not attend school regularly and punctually. This will be done under the 1996 Education Act, Section 444. It aims to ensure that parents carry out their duty to secure suitable education for their children. If a child is in the care of foster carers or in a residential home, it is important that the carers recognise their parenting role where attendance to school is concerned. They will be supported by close co-operation between the school, education welfare services and social services where such a child's attendance is irregular.

Penalty Notices may be considered appropriate if one of the following criteria is met:

- There is unauthorised persistent absence. "Persistent" means at least 20 sessions of unauthorised absence over a period of twelve school weeks, excluding holidays. These absences do not need to be consecutive.
- There is a period of absence not authorised by the head teacher or in excess of the period authorised by the head teacher. (e.g. family holiday)
- Persistent late arrival at school, i.e. after the register has closed. "Persistent" means at least 10 sessions of unauthorised late arrival over a period of 12 school weeks, excluding holidays. These late episodes do not need to be consecutive.
- The presence of an excluded child in a public place at any time during school hours in that child's first five days of exclusion. An "excluded child" is one who has been excluded from school for a given period under the Education and Inspections Act 2006.
- A Penalty Notice will not be issued in respect of children in the care of the LA with whom other interventions will be used.

A session is equivalent to half a day in school.

Other conditions

- There will be no limit on the times a Penalty Notice for unauthorised leave of absence can be used in an academic year
- In cases where there is more than one pupil in a family with unauthorised absences, Penalty Notices may be issued for more than one child
- Use of a Penalty Notice or formal warning of a Penalty Notice for unauthorised persistent absence / lateness will be restricted to one notice/ warning per parent of a pupil per academic year.

As part of this process the parent(s) will first be issued with a 20-day notice period, clearly advising that if unauthorised absence / lateness occurs in this 20 day period, a Penalty Notice may be issued. This is to allow the parents a further period to address their child's irregular attendance by working with the school or other agencies. It is part of a scaled approach and affords the parents an opportunity to avoid receiving a penalty notice. This is seen as good practice and integral to a proportionate response.

Therefore, the process is as follows:

- School completes and signs a penalty notice request form.
- School provides the pupils attendance registration certificate signed by the Head teacher / Principal - or their nominated deputy - confirming that non-attendance / lateness during the period was unauthorised.
- School provides an assessment and plan which demonstrates that the use of a Penalty Notice is now the appropriate action to improve the child's school attendance / punctuality.
- The local authority issues a 20-day Warning Notice to the parent (s) advising them of the possibility of a Penalty Notice being issued and that the child must have no unauthorised absence / lateness during the set period.

- If there are unauthorised absences / lateness in the period and after due consideration of the facts of the case with the school, issue a Penalty Notice through the post.

Please note:

Where the Penalty Notice is requested from a school in response to a leave of absence (holiday) related unauthorised absence or is in relation to an offence under section 103 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the formal warning letter and 20 day improvement period will not apply.

All Penalty Notices are entered onto a database maintained by Families First to ensure that no duplicate Penalty Notices are issued.

Use of a Penalty Notice or formal warning of a Penalty Notice for unauthorised persistent absence / lateness will be restricted to one notice/ warning per parent of a pupil per academic year.

Payment of Penalty Notices:

Arrangements for payment will be detailed on the Penalty Notice.

The penalty notice fine would be:

- £60 per parent per child if paid within 21 days, rising to
- £120 per parent per child if paid between 21 - 28 days.
- If the fine is not paid within 28 days, you may be prosecuted under section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996.

If prosecution takes place under section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996 the maximum fine is £1000 per parent per child. This reflects the seriousness of unauthorised absence from school.

The County Council retains any revenue from Penalty Notices to cover enforcement costs (collection or prosecuting in the event of non-payment).

Non-payment of Penalty Notices:

Non-payment of a Penalty Notice will result in the withdrawal of the Penalty Notice and will trigger the fast-track prosecution process under the provisions of section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996.

Elective Home Education

If school receives written notification from Parents that they wish to home educate their child, they will be asked to attend a meeting at school to further discuss their reasons and to resolve any issues. Prior to making a decision to elective home educate, Parents are requested to contact Staffordshire County Councils Elective Home Education department; <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/Elective-Home-Education/Elective-Home-Education.aspx>

Summary

It is vital to a child's progress that they attend school as often as possible and that they are on time. There are strong and proven links between pupil attendance and educational achievement. Attendance of less than 95% (equivalent to 9.5 days or more absence in a school year) has been shown to compromise pupil attainment. An attendance of 90% is equivalent to missing 19 days or nearly 4 weeks from school in a year. Only 10% of pupils who are persistently absent from school achieve 5 A*-C grades at GCSE.

Impact of absence:

- 90% attendance = 19 days off school
- 85% attendance = 29 days off school (a whole half term)
- 80% attendance = 38 days off school
- 70% attendance = 57 days off school (a whole term)

Impact of lateness: Over a school year -

- 5 minutes late every day = 3 days absent
- 15 minutes late every day = 10 days absent
- 30 minutes late every day = 19 days absent

If parents have any concerns relating to attendance or lateness that they wish to discuss, they should contact Mrs Jo Moulton in the first instance. School staff are committed to working with parents as the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend.

School Targets for 2023-24

- Whole school target - 97%, Persistent absentee target - 0%
- Persistent absentees are defined as those pupils missing 10% or more of possible sessions.

Monitoring

It is the responsibility of the Senior Management Team and Governor's Curriculum Committee to monitor the implementation of the Attendance Policy including correct submission of attendance information.

Agreed by the Governing Body November 2023

To be reviewed November 2024