

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 VIP 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. Parents need to:
- inform school straight away if their 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 their child about school and let the school know if their child is worried about any issues such as difficulties with homework or friendship problems.
- not book holidays in term time - this will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.
- seek advice from their GP if they are not sure how long to keep their child off school with an illness.
- ensure school has all the up to date contact details.

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/working-together-to-improve-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 8.55am. 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

Punctuality - Lateness

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 Council's Code of Conduct for issuing penalty notices for persistent lateness.

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 before 9.00am 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 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 5 days, 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 acquired 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.

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.

Changes to Penalty Notices for School Absence from 19th August 2024

The new National Framework introduced consistency in the use of Penalty Notices across England by introducing a new national threshold at which they are considered. The framework increases the amount of the Penalty Notice and introduces a new national limit of 2 Penalty Notices within a 3-year rolling period to break cycles of repeat offending.

In line with the guidance, Staffordshire County Council will prioritise the 'support first' approach expecting that support will have been offered to families in cases where it is appropriate. However, Penalty Notices can be issued without a Notice to Improve in cases where support is not appropriate (such as leave of absence in term time) or when support has not been engaged with.

Penalty Notices are requested by schools and academies and issued by the Local Authority to the parents/carers of statutory school age children, per parent, per child. For example: two children in a family absent from school for a leave of absence may result in each parent receiving a Penalty Notice for each child at the below rates.

- First offence - The first time a Penalty Notice is issued the amount will be: £80 per parent, per child paid within 21 days. This increases to £160 per parent, per child if paid after day 21, until day 28. Any non-payment of the Penalty Notice may be referred to the Magistrates Court.
- Second Offence (within 3 years) - the second time a Penalty Notice is issued the amount will be £160 per parent, per child paid within 28 days. Any non-payment of the Penalty Notice may be referred to the Magistrates Court.
- Third Offence and Any Further Offences (within 3 years) - the third time an offence is committed a Penalty Notice will not be issued, and the case may be presented straight to the Magistrates' Court under s.444 of the Education Act (1996) or other legal interventions considered. The Magistrates' Court can order fines up to £2500 per parent, per child.
- Leave of Absence (Holidays) Penalty Notices can be requested by schools for leave of absence in term time for 5 or more days. This can be consecutive absence, or non- consecutive. In line with the National Framework, the Local Authority retains the discretion to issue a Penalty Notice before the threshold is met. For example, when parents/carers are deliberately avoiding the national threshold by taking multiple term time holidays below threshold, or for repeated absence for birthdays or other family events, or a combination of non-attendance due to leave of absence and unauthorised absence.

Unauthorised Absence Penalty Notices can be requested by schools when there have been 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a 10-week period. In these circumstances a Notice to Improve may be sent by the Local Authority on behalf of the school, this will stipulate the support that has already been implemented and the ongoing support that is available to the parent and child to improve school attendance. The Notice to Improve will also detail the expected improvements that must be made over a set time frame to prevent the Penalty Notice being issued.

Further information on the National Framework can be found within Working Together to Improve Attendance 2024. The National Framework comes into effect from 19th August 2024. [Working together to improve school attendance \(applies from 19 August 2024\) \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/125444/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_applies_from_19_August_2024.pdf)

A penalty notice may also be issued where parents allow their child to be present in a public place during school hours without reasonable justification during the first 5 days of a fixed period or permanent exclusion. St Mary's school will notify the parents of the days the pupil must not be present in a public place. This type of penalty notice is not included in the National Framework and therefore not subject to the same considerations about support being provided or count towards the limit as part of the escalation process in the case of repeat offences for non-attendance.

A session is equivalent to half a day in school.

Elective Home Education

If school receives written notification from parents that they wish to home educate their child, school will contact the parent and discuss their reasons in more detail, offering support to deal with any issues raised. If after this time the parent still wishes to home educate their child, the school will inform the Local Authority of the decision to remove the child's name from the admissions register.

Whilst school will not seek to prevent parents from choosing to home educate their child, neither will they seek to encourage them to do this - particularly as a way of avoiding exclusion or due to a poor attendance record. Prior to deciding to home educate, parents are requested to contact Staffordshire County Council Elective Home Education department.

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 the Head Teacher, 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 2025-26

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

Agreed by the Governing Body October 2025
To be reviewed September 2026