



St. Mary's C of E Primary Academy  
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING TRUST



# Attendance Policy

**Introduced:** January 2022

**Approved:** January 2022

**Reviewed:** June 2023

## Introduction

At St. Mary's C of E Primary Academy, we are committed to promoting a culture of high expectation, achievement and excellence. Our aim, at St. Mary's is to ensure that all of our children have equal access to opportunities and experiences at school. Alongside this we strive to provide the best support that we can to parents and carers in order for their child to be a regular attender at school.

Registration is a legal requirement and it is taken at the beginning of each morning and afternoon sessions. At St. Mary's we use an agreed coding for absences in line with the DfE School Attendance Guide.

Every child should be at school, on time, every day that school is open unless there is a genuine reason for absence. We do all that we can to encourage children to attend and we have put in place appropriate procedures to monitor each child's attendance.

St. Mary's C of E Primary Academy belongs to the JESS Cluster family of schools. All primary schools within the JESS Cluster work towards achieving the Leeds average attendance of 96%. JESS Cluster schools will also aim towards achieving Persistent Absence levels of below the Leeds average for primary schools of 8.4%

Encouraging good attendance and punctuality is the shared responsibility of school, the parents/carers, the JESS cluster staff and its partners.

## Why is Attendance Important?

Good attendance at school is crucial in ensuring our children receive the very best education and in helping them to reach their potential. Good attendance is also vitally important to a child's social and emotional development and to prepare each child for the start of the next part of their education journey when they leave our school.

It is proven by research that there is a link between regular attendance and educational progress and attainment. It is those children whose attendance is poor, that often fall behind in their learning and struggle to make expected progress in learning.

## Policy Aims

The aims of this policy are:

- ✓ To ensure that our children are safe – we will contact parents/carers when a child is absent so that we know, to the best of our knowledge, where a child is when they are absent.
- ✓ To support our children and their families to ensure that each child in our school has the highest possible levels of attendance and punctuality.
- ✓ To ensure that parents / carers are aware of their legal responsibilities in relation to attendance at school.
- ✓ To raise levels of attainment and achievement through high expectations of attendance and punctuality.
- ✓ To create a culture where good attendance is both accepted and celebrated.

## Key Responsibilities

### Governors

Governors are responsible for:

- ❖ ensuring that legal requirements for registration are complied with
- ❖ monitoring overall attendance figures for the school on at least a termly basis
- ❖ holding the Head teacher to account for the implementation of this policy
- ❖ adopting and reviewing the Attendance Policy on an annual basis

### Head teacher

The Head teacher (Mr John Davie) is responsible for:

- ❖ ensuring this policy is implemented consistently across school
- ❖ making decisions regarding leave of absence requests
- ❖ ensuring the school confirms all statutory requirements in respect of attendance
- ❖ reporting attendance to the Governors

### Deputy Head teacher (Designated Safeguarding Lead and Strategic Leader for Attendance)

The Deputy Head teacher (Ms Jessica Crisp) is responsible for:

- ❖ ensuring attendance has a high profile within the school
- ❖ ensuring there are designated staff with day-to-day responsibility for attendance matters
- ❖ promoting, recognising and rewarding attendance throughout school
- ❖ monitoring individual attendance using the attendance levels model and taking appropriate actions at the identified level thresholds
- ❖ ensuring the Attendance Policy is available on the school website
- ❖ communicating with parents/carers regarding attendance regularly throughout the year
- ❖ reporting attendance half-termly to the Head teacher
- ❖ responding to any concerns from a child or parent/carer that may have an effect on a child's attendance
- ❖ ensuring parents/carers are contacted when a child is absent from school and where no information has been received to explain the absence
- ❖ following up any unexplained absences
- ❖ developing an attendance plan for children who have frequent absences due to medical conditions
- ❖ meeting with representatives from the Local Authority and JESS Cluster regarding attendance
- ❖ notifying the local authority after 10 days of continuous unexplained absence; following the Children Missing in Education process
- ❖ keeping accurate and up to date records for all contacts and actions taken in relation to attendance

- ❖ keeping parents/carers informed of any attendance related issues, including challenging them about regular or unexplained absences
- ❖ arranging home visits where contact is not made with parents/carers to explain a child's absence
- ❖ organising certificates and rewards for attendance

### **Administrative Assistant**

The Administrative Assistant (Mrs Debbie Crosthwaite) is responsible for:

- ❖ monitoring registers on a daily basis and making phone calls home when children are absent – as delegated by the Deputy head teacher
- ❖ arranging meetings for parents/carers with the Head teacher to discuss Leave of Absence requests

### **Class Teachers (or the adult responsible for leading each session)**

Class teachers are responsible for:

- ❖ recording daily attendance using the correct codes on Arbor – morning registers should be taken before 9am and updated at 9:30am and afternoon registers should be taken before 1:15pm
- ❖ encouraging children in their class to have good attendance
- ❖ raising concerns about an individual child's attendance
- ❖ promoting good attendance with parents/carers
- ❖ following up on absences with children and their parents/carers
- ❖ reporting attendance to parents/carers at Parent/Carer Evenings

### **Parents / Carers**

Parents / Carers are responsible for:

- ❖ ensuring their child/children attend school regularly and punctually – **this is a legal requirement**
- ❖ contacting school each day (before 9:30am) that their child will be absent to explain why
- ❖ avoiding holidays in term time, but applying in advance using the correct form to request a leave of absence in exceptional circumstances
- ❖ attending meetings relating to attendance or punctuality
- ❖ cooperating with interventions offered by school or other agencies to improve attendance or punctuality
- ❖ making sure their child/children are collected from school in time
- ❖ arranging medical appointments, whenever possible, outside of the school day and showing evidence of any appointments that are arranged during the school day
- ❖ notifying the school immediately of any changes to contact details

## Punctuality

At St. Mary's C of E Primary Academy, we expect all of our children to be at school, on time, every day. Children who are late miss the start of the school day and can often miss vital information and news which is shared by the class teacher at the start of the day. Children who arrive at school late can also disrupt lessons and this can be embarrassing for the child.

**Being 10 minutes later every day of the school year is the same as missing two weeks of school.**

The school day starts at 8:55am when external doors are opened and children make their way to their classrooms. Registers are taken at 9am and registers close at 9:30am. If a child arrives at school after the start of the school day, but before 9:30am then they will be recorded as later (L on the register) and the number of minutes they are late will be recorded. Children arriving at school after 9:30am will be recorded as an unauthorised absence and can be subject to prosecution by the Local Authority. Class teachers will take the afternoon register at the start of the afternoon session.

Our register system Arbor monitors lateness. Letters will be sent home to parents/carers of children who are regularly late and parents/carers may be invited in to a meeting to discuss punctuality.

## Reporting Absence

If a child is absent then parents / carers should contact school before 9:30am (or as soon as possible after) on each day that the child is absent to inform us as to why their child is absent. Parents / Carers should, if possible, let school know of the expected day of return for the child.

**Please contact school in 0113 2717204 and leave a message on the answerphone or speak to a member of the Office Team. Messages can also be sent using the Arbor app.**

## Safeguarding

Children may be at risk of harm if they do not attend school regularly. Safeguarding the interests of each child is everyone's responsibility and at St. Mary's promoting the welfare of our children encompasses attendance, managing behaviour, access to the curriculum, health and safety and anti-bullying.

**Failing to attend school on a regular basis will be considered as a safeguarding matter.**

## First Day of Absence

When a child is absent from school we will follow our 'First Day of Absence' procedure (see Appendix 1) to ensure we systematically check the absence of all children and that the reason for absence is established and recorded correctly on the register. If the authenticity of an illness is in doubt then school may ask for medical evidence such as a doctor's note, prescription or appointment card. St. Mary's has a robust system in place for keeping accurate records of all actions and contact made.

If parents / carers cannot be contacted and the child is absent for a second day then staff will use all emergency contact details for the child to ascertain the reason for absence. If school cannot verify the whereabouts of a child by day 3 then they will make a home visit. If school have concerns for the safety of a child then they will contact Children's Social Work Services or the police.

When a child returns to school following an absence of more than 2 days and no reason has been given to explain the absence then a letter will be sent to the parent/carer to ask for the reason. If no reason is given within 10 days of the absence then this will be recorded as an UNAUTHORISED absence.

If a child is absent from school for 10 consecutive days and this is an unauthorised absence then school is legally bound to inform the Local Authority.

### Medical Appointments

We request that parents/carers make medical appointments out of school hours whenever possible. When this is not possible the child should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary – children are expected to attend school before or after the appointment, depending on the time of the appointment. Medical appointments can be marked as AUTHORISED absences if evidence of the appointment has been shown to the school office or class teacher.

### Explaining Absences

Each school day is split into two sessions – morning and afternoon. School has to classify every session where a child is absent as AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. The decision whether to authorise an absence or not rests with the school.

**Authorised absences** are sessions away from school when the school accepts that there is a good reason for absence and communication from the parent/carer has been received. Authorised absences include when a child is unwell and unable to attend school, religious observances or urgent medical appointments.

**Unauthorised absences** are those which school does not consider to be reasonable or where no contact has been made to school from the parent/carers.

These can include (this list is not exhaustive):

- children staying off school unnecessarily – e.g. reluctance to attend school, parent/carer not well
- a child who has higher than average illness or is a persistent absentee (without medical evidence)
- a leave of absence has been requested but not approved by the Head teacher
- shopping trips, day trips or birthday treats
- absences that are not explained properly
- oversleeping

## **Persistent Absence**

Persistent absence is defined as a child whose attendance is below 90%. Schools have an obligation to notify the Local Authority of any child who is a persistent absentee. Children who fall within this definition of a persistent absentee will be discussed by the school's senior leadership and pastoral team with a view to providing effective support to improve attendance.

### Classification of a Persistent Absentee at the end of each half term

Autumn 1 (September to October half term) = 7 sessions or more missed

Autumn 2 (October half term to Christmas) = 14 sessions or more missed since September

Spring 1 (Christmas to February half term) = 20 sessions or more missed since September

Spring 2 (February half term to Easter) = 25 sessions or more missed since September

Summer 1 (Easter to May half term) = 32 sessions or more missed since September

Summer 2 (May half term to Summer holidays) = 38 sessions or more missed since September

Patterns of absence will be monitored and persistent absentees will have an individual action plan. An Early Help Assessment and Plan may inform actions where applicable.

### Interventions to support Persistent Absentees

- Letters to parents/cares
- Home visits
- Meetings
- Fast Track
- Early Help Plans
- Individual attendance plan
- Referrals to the JESS Cluster
- Parent / Carer support (with Ms Williamson)
- Nurture support
- Rewards and celebrations for attendance

## **Fast Track and Casework**

Attendance will be closely monitored and where it remains unsatisfactory despite school intervention, it will be escalated for further action. Escalation may be in the form of a referral to the JESS cluster, casework where an individual response is necessary, or fast track.

### **Fast track**

Each half term a list will be generated of all children with 10 or more unauthorised absences in the last 12 weeks and the senior leadership team will consider placing them on either fast track or case work (appendix 4). School will provide the JESS Cluster with names of children who have been placed on a Fast Track.

### **Casework**

Where health, financial, housing, mental health, domestic violence, young carers and similar issues are involved school will refer the family to the JESS Cluster for support, involve the school nurse, CSWS, the School Attendance Service or other agencies. Where other agencies are involved school will regularly liaise and meet with them to support improved attendance. Where attendance remains a concern the school will convene a School Attendance Panel formally inviting the family and any agencies involved. Minutes of this panel will be taken and they will be sent to parents/carers regardless of whether they attended the meeting or not. Attendance shall be reviewed and where there are still 10 or more unauthorised absences in a 12-week period the case will be referred to the School Attendance Service Team Manager for consideration of legal action.

### **Fines and Penalty Notices**

Parents/carers can be fined for unauthorised absences from school where the child is of compulsory school age and parents/carers are not engaging with intervention and support to improve their child's attendance. Unauthorised absences are referred to the School Attendance Service of Leeds Local Authority and they may issue a fixed penalty and this policy is in line with the Leeds City Council Code of Conduct on Penalty Notices.

A fixed penalty is payable per adult, per child and is £60 if paid within the first 21 days, or £120 if payment is made within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the Local Authority. If the payment is not made within 28 days the Local Authority will either refer the case for prosecution under Section 44 of the Education Act 1996m for failing to ensure regular school attendance, or withdraw the notice.

Circumstances in which a penalty notice may be issued are (this list is not exhaustive):

- 10 unauthorised sessions over a 12 week period
- unauthorised absences of five days or more in term time
- being persistently late after the register has closed (9:30am)
- being in a public place during a period of exclusion from school
- unauthorised absences that are condoned by parents/carers



## Monitoring Absence and Attendance

At St. Mary's we follow the statutory guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (September, 2023) and we will respond swiftly if children go missing, or are absent from school. We require at least two emergency contact numbers for each child and parents/carers should update these with school when required.

We monitor absence on a daily, weekly and half termly basis and take actions when required.

Attendance at St. Mary's C of E Primary Academy is measured using a level system.

Attendance which falls below our expected 96% (YELLOW) will trigger attendance letter 1 (96% Attendance Letter). This letter will inform parents/carers of potential concerns and ask for co-operation to improve their child's attendance.

Attendance which falls below 90% (RED) will trigger attendance letter 2 (90% Attendance Letter). Absences for children whose attendance is below 90% will only be authorised if medical evidence is shown. If attendance does not improve then a meeting will be called with the Deputy Head teacher and parents/carers will be required to attend. This meeting will discuss issues relating to attendance, make expectations clear and set clear targets for improvement.

If a child is classed as a persistent absentee (RED: attendance below 90%) and they have 10 or more unauthorised absences in one 12 week period, then a Fast Track will be put in place to monitor attendance. This will usually begin at the start of a new term. The Fast Track process can lead to a Penalty Notice if attendance does not improve.

Attendance which falls below 85% (BLACK) is classed as a safeguarding concern. Parents/Carers will be required to meet with the Head teacher to discuss their child's attendance.

Unauthorised absences can lead to a fixed penalty fine.

## Holidays

Parents / carers should avoid booking family holidays during term time. From 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013 The Education (Pupil registration) (England) Amendment Regulations make clear Head teachers may **not** grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.

In exceptional circumstances when a parent or carer wishes to request a leave of absence (holiday during term time) then they should complete a Leave of Absence form. The form should include information to explain the special circumstances why the child needs to be taken out of school and should be completed at least two weeks in advance of the request date. Cheaper holidays during term time or parent/carer leave from work are not recognised as valid reasons for approval of a holiday in term time. The Head teacher will arrange to meet with parents/carers to consider the leave of absence request and will decide whether the absence will be authorised or not. Parents / carers will be notified of the decision made and the Head teachers decision is final. If the request has not been authorised but the child is still taken out of school, the absence will be recorded as UNAUTHORISED and may be passed to the Local Authority for a Penalty Notice.

Requests for absence for reasons such as compassionate leave, special family events, sporting or musical competitions etc... should be made in writing to the school.

### Children Missing in Education (CME)

A child going missing, or being absent from education is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect. When a child's absence is unexplained the school will contact the parents on the first day of absence. If the absence remains unexplained the school will try to establish the child's safety and whereabouts. The school will make reasonable enquiries such as ringing all emergency contacts and checking with neighbours and friends in school. School will make a CME referral as soon as possible when they have had no contact from a family, but no later than when the child has been missing from school for 20 days in the following circumstances:

- a child has left the country **regardless** of if a new address and/or new school information has been provided
- a child is rumoured to have moved out of the area
- a child has moved to a different local authority and is not on the roll of a new school **within 20 days** of leaving your school

### Rewards for Attendance

**Each week** in Celebration Worship, the children who had 100% attendance (with no lates) the week before will have their names read out. They will stand up for a St. Mary's 'clap and twirl'. The class which had the highest attendance in the previous week will be awarded with the Attendance Bear to keep in their classroom.

**Each half-term** certificates will be awarded for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place to classes for:

- highest % of 100% attendance
- highest % of 97%+ attendance

**Each term** individual certificates will be awarded according to the attendance levels for children who have achieved **Bronze (96%)**, **Silver (97 – 99%)** or **Gold (100%)** attendance.

**At the end of each half term**, the class who has had the best attendance will have a pizza and movie party.

**Appendix 1: First Day of Absence Procedure**

When a child is absent from school we will follow our 'First Day of Absence' procedure to ensure the school systematically checks the absence of all children and that the reason for absence is established and recorded correctly on the register. If the authenticity of an illness is in doubt then school may ask for medical evidence such as a doctor's note, prescription or appointment card. St. Mary's has a robust system in place for keeping accurate records of all actions and contact made.

Day	Actions
1	<p>Phone calls home will be made before 10:30am. <i>Calls to be made in order of priority: Child Protection Plan, Child in Need Plan, Child Looked After, Persistent Absentees, Early Help Plan, Pupil Premium, SEND</i></p> <p>If there are safeguarding concerns about the child or family, then a home visit will be carried out by a member of the Designated Safeguarding Team. These home visits will be logged on CPOMs and Children's Social Work Services (CSWS) will be contacted where appropriate.</p> <p>Where a valid reason is given by the parent/carer the register will be amended to the relevant code.</p>
2	<p>Phone calls home will be made before 10:30am. <i>Calls to be made in order of priority: Child Protection Plan, Child in Need Plan, Looked After Children, Persistent Absentees, Early Help Plan, Pupil Premium, SEND</i></p> <p>School will contact all emergency contacts on the child's record to try and establish where the child is if no contact is made with the primary parent/carer.</p> <p>If there are safeguarding concerns about the child or family then CSWS will be contacted, or the police will be contacted and asked to complete a welfare visit. These concerns will be logged on CPOMs.</p> <p>Where a valid reason is given by the parent/carer the register will be amended to the relevant code.</p> <p>If no reason has been established by 3pm a text message will be sent home informing the parent/carer that there is a safeguarding concern for their child's absence and if they do not make contact with school, then CSWS or the police may be contacted.</p>

<b>3</b>	<p>Phone calls home will be made before 10:30am.  <i>Calls to be made in order of priority: Child Protection Plan, Child in Need Plan, Looked After Children, Persistent Absentees, Early Help Plan, Pupil Premium, SEND</i></p> <p>School will contact all emergency contacts on the child's record to try and establish where the child is if no contact is made with the parent/carer.</p> <p>If there are safeguarding concerns about the child or family then CSWS will be contacted again, or the police will be contacted and asked to complete a welfare visit. These concerns will be logged on CPOMs.</p> <p>If the child's whereabouts have not been established, then a home visit will be carried out by a member of the Designated Safeguarding Team. These home visits will be logged on CPOMs.</p> <p>If no contact is made then CSWS will be contacted for advice and guidance. This will be logged on CPOMs.</p> <p>Where a valid reason is given by the parent/carer the register will be amended to the relevant code.</p>
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**If school do not believe evidence given is truthful, or if a pattern of absence emerges then the Designated Safeguarding Lead will contact the parent/carer and request a signed medical evidence letter.**

**If school cannot make contact to ascertain the whereabouts of a child then we will report the child as a Child Missing in Education (CME) to the Local Authority within 20 days of the child's last attendance at school.**

**If a child moves out of Leeds Local Authority and is not registered with another school a CME referral will be made to the Local Authority.**

## Appendix 2 Missing from School Response Checklist

Referral pathway for reporting children and young people missing /absconded during the school day

