

St. Mark's Catholic Primary School



Attendance and Punctuality Policy

Proudly & Joyfully, we Love, Live & Learn as God's Children.

Our Mission

Proudly and Joyfully, we Love, live and learn as God's children

Rationale of this Policy

All children of compulsory school age have the right to an efficient full-time education, regardless of age, aptitude, ability and any special needs s/he may have. Regular school attendance is essential if a child is to make the most of the educational opportunity available to them. St. Mark's Catholic Primary School takes seriously its responsibility to monitor and promote the regular attendance of all its pupils. It acknowledges that irregular attendance seriously disrupts continuity of learning, undermines educational progress, can lead to underachievement and low attainment and impedes the child's ability to develop friendship groups within school. For these reasons the staff have created a set of procedures and practice which we hope will create an ethos whereby children want to be in school and know the reasons why non attendance is not acceptable.

We aim to work in partnership with pupils, parents, staff, governors, the Educational Welfare Service and the Local Authority to ensure that all children reach an optimal level of attendance and secure their long term educational and life skill prospects. We take issues on non attendance and poor punctuality very seriously and will work within the parameters of the law as provided for us by the Local Authority education legal team to ensure that a child's right to an education is maintained.

School Attendance is a Safeguarding and Child Protection issue. The school will investigate all absence and will make referrals to Children's Advice Support Service (CASS) and the Missing Child Team if we have concerns about the welfare and location of any pupil at this school. It is for this reason that staff in school who monitor attendance are also Designated Safeguarding Leads.

This policy seeks to ensure that all parties involved in the practicalities of school attendance and punctuality are aware and informed of attendance matters in school and to outline the schools commitment to attendance matters. It details the responsibilities of individuals and groups involved and the procedures in place to promote and monitor pupil attendance.

Legal Requirements

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 apply to all maintained schools, academies, studio schools, free schools and independent schools.

It is a legal requirement that schools will:-

- Be open to all pupils for 380 sessions each school year (This is the same as 190 school days – morning is one session and afternoon is one session)
- Maintain attendance registers (either manual or computerised) in accordance with the relevant regulations. At St. Mark's Catholic Primary School we maintain computerised registers.
- Accurately record and monitor all absenteeism and lateness.

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- Clearly distinguish between absence which is authorised and absence which is unauthorised according to criteria laid down by the DfE (schools should remind parents that it is the decision of the Head teacher as to whether or not an absence will be authorised).
- Submit termly absence returns through School Census and publish information relating to levels of attendance and absence and include details of these in the school's prospectus and annual report.
- Set annual targets to reduce absence and submit these targets in accordance with the relevant regulations.

The school is committed to increasing attendance each year and maximising opportunities for pupils to excel. As part of this commitment we set challenging but achievable targets for children and families for their school attendance.

St. Mark's Catholic Primary School attendance target is 98%.

Current Legislation about Attendance

Amendments (Sept 2016) to the 2006 Regulations removed references to family holiday and extended leave as well as the statutory threshold of ten school days. The amendments make clear that Head Teachers may **NOT** grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Further updated guidance received from Birmingham City Council in respect of Leave in Term Time requests that legal action be taken in conjunction with the 'Fast Track to Attendance' programme as part of a holistic approach to achieving excellent attendance.

The Regulations regarding deletion from roll, however, remain unchanged.

The Impact of Time Off and Poor Punctuality

Please note that the Government changes the regulation about Persistent absence in 2015. Pupils who are away from school for whatever reason, for 10% of their timetable, they are regarded as Persistent Absences and the school has to involve other agencies.

Attendance of less than 95% (i.e. absences of 9.5 school days or more out of the 190 pupil days in the school year) is shown to compromise pupil attainment. At 90% attendance pupils miss the equivalent of almost 4 weeks education (19 school days) and only 10% of pupils who are persistently absent from school achieve 5 A-C grades at GCSE.

Being late adds up to lost learning too!

If you are 5 minutes late everyday you will miss 3 school days in one year.

If you are 15 minutes late everyday you will miss 10 school days in one year.

If you are 30 minutes late everyday you will miss 19 school days in one year – the equivalent of nearly 100 hours of learning.

You need to be on time for school with all of the correct equipment to ensure you get the most from your learning opportunities at St. Mark's Catholic Primary School.

Attendance Officers in school are:

Mrs. Hussain and Miss Ison – both members of staff are also DSL trained.

Responsibilities of the School

The policy will aim to raise and maintain levels of attendance and punctuality by:

- Ensuring that attendance is monitored effectively at all levels and reasons for absences are recorded...promptly and consistently.
- Ensuring that staff know, understand and follow the set procedures about registration. The registers are legal documents and must be completed correctly.
- Reporting attendance in the school newsletter so that children and visitors can see how well they are doing at hitting attendance targets.
- Promoting the need for good attendance with parents and carers so that they understand the need for consistent attendance and support their children in attending school everyday.
- Raise the profile of punctuality among pupils and parents so that they understand how punctuality can affect attendance figures.
- Ensure that clear attendance information is regularly communicated to parents through the school prospectus, through newsletters, through parents' evenings or through other media; (parents will be specifically reminded of their legal responsibilities for ensuring their children's regular and punctual attendance).
- Make provision for first-day of absence contact, particularly in relation to pupils who are known to be poor attenders or who might otherwise be considered to be at risk.
- Stress to parents the importance of continuity of learning, particularly in relation to family holidays during term-time (The Head Teacher will **NOT** authorise any holidays taken during term time and children who take unauthorised holidays in term time and fail to return in good time **risk losing the school place for their child**).

Responsibilities of Parents

Parents are responsible in law for ensuring that their children attend the school at which they are registered regularly, on time and in a fit condition to learn.

Parents can do a great deal to support the regular and punctual attendance of their children. Parents should:-

- Ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day.
- Ensure that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness or days of religious observance. These will be discussed later in this policy.
- Always notify the school as soon as possible - on the first morning - of any absence. A phone call between 8 – 10am to enable the registers to be kept up to date and accurate. Parents will be contacted if we do not receive a message.
- To work closely with the school and it's legal representatives (and agencies such as CASS, Think Family/Children's Services, Health professionals etc) to resolve any problems that may impede a child's attendance
- Book non-emergency medical appointments outside school hours when possible. Most doctors and dental surgeries, as well as opticians have Saturday and Sunday appointments or late night opening once a week.
- Do NOT book family holidays during term-time. Only a Head Teacher can give permission for absence from school during the 190 days that pupils are expected to attend.
- Family emergencies need careful consideration. It is not always in the best interests of the pupil nor appropriate for them to miss school for family emergencies that are being dealt with by adult family members. School and school friendships and relationships can provide pupils with stability and care during difficult times. The routine of school can provide a safe and familiar background to life during times of upheaval.

Implications of Unauthorised Absence

Where a Head teacher has not granted the pupil any leave, and the school suspects that the parents may have taken their child on unauthorised term time holiday, the school will immediately contact by telephone and letter to ascertain the reason for absence.

Parents must be advised that the pupil may lose his/her place at St. Mark's Catholic Primary School if we are unable to locate them and the statutory period of absence is reached, the family may be reported to the Child Missing in Education Team (CME), that the absence will be unauthorised (using code G) and that the Local Authority may issue a penalty notice. School, as part of our holistic approach to achieving excellent attendance, run the 'Fast Track to Attendance' programme, fast track court action for pupils with 20 or more unauthorised absences over the calendar year. This process will involve legal proceedings and could result in a penalty notice being issued and possibly a criminal record.

Holidays in Term Time:

Holidays during term time are **NOT** authorised at St. Mark's Catholic Primary School. Whilst we appreciate the advantages of travel to broaden children's understanding of the world, we believe that in 175 days off per year, children have plenty of time to enjoy travel opportunities.

If parents insist on taking a holiday/absence during term time, it will be recorded in the registration record as **G** the code for unauthorised absence. Parents will be asked to sign a Holiday Notification Form stating the date on which the child will return to school and parents will understand that the child's place at St. Mark's Catholic Primary School may be lost if the contract is broken. This form does not give permission for the leave to take place but merely alerts the school to the pupil's location. As part of the Spotlight Campaign and in light of guidance issued by BCC in May 2017 parents may be liable to prosecution.

We will need to see holiday confirmation documentation such as an invoice and/or flight tickets as part of the Holiday Notification process.

Fast Track to Attendance – An Early Help Approach

When a pupil with attendance difficulties is referred to the Deputy Head and/or the Head Teacher and they will engage in an Early Help approach, appropriate individual casework of the pupil in question to improve the attendance.

Casework is undertaken with pupils and their parents in order to bring about a pupil's return to regular attendance, taking account of individual circumstances and responding accordingly. In the worst cases a legal route to demand a return to full attendance will be sought.

Attendance meetings/surgeries

- a pattern of irregular attendance has developed
- a period of entrenched non-attendance has begun
- communication by the school to the parents has met with little or no response
- there is evidence of a lack of parental co-operation in ensuring a child's regular attendance
- a parent withdraws a pupil from school having expressed an intention to educate him or her otherwise than at school (Elective Home Education)

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- a pupil is withdrawn from school by the parents who are moving to another area and the school does not have a confirmed destination school/provider where the child will resume his or her education (such pupils will be treated as “children missing education”)
- a pattern of persistent lateness has developed
- there are child protection concerns
- there are specific and identifiable welfare issues which are preventing a pupil from accessing education

Fast Track to Attendance- Local Authority Policy on Prosecution

- Schools should ensure parents have access to the ‘School Attendance’ whole school letter to parents at least once a year (preferably in September) to alert parents to their legal responsibilities in this area and to deter parents from keeping their children at home/taking them on holiday when they should be in school. Most schools will place the letter on their website, send via pupil post etc.
- In the case of on-going absence schools are expected to try to improve a pupil's attendance via ‘FAST-track to Attendance’, Birmingham’s Early Help approach to improving attendance. This would include an Early Help offer as appropriate and ensuring that ‘the voice of the child’ is heard.
- Where there is an unauthorised leave in term time which reaches the threshold under the Birmingham Education Penalty Notice Code of Conduct, schools must use the ‘Leave in Term Time (Penalty Notice) Process’ in order for the Local Authority to take action on their behalf.
- When a school’s attempts to improve a pupil’s attendance have been unsuccessful using either ‘FAST-track’ or the ‘Leave in Term Time’ processes, the school will refer the case to the Education Legal Intervention Team
- In order for the Local Authority to act there must be a minimum of 20 sessions of unauthorised absence collected as prescribed in each process over a calendar year
- If the matter proceeds to the Magistrates Court and the parent pleads not guilty, schools must provide the relevant members of staff as witnesses, having already provided ELIT with a statement of witness.

Day to Day Procedures for Managing Absence and Punctuality

FIRST DAY OF ABSENCE: If it is the first day of absence and a parent or carer has given an explanation by telephone we will inform the teacher, record the explanation in the absence book and enter it in the register using the code which tells us why the child is away. If we have received no information from a parent or carer we record the absence as **N**. This means no reason is given and is unauthorised. The Office will telephone parents whose children are not in school on the first day to ensure children are safe and to get an explanation.

SECOND DAY OF ABSENCE: On the second day of absence the school will still try to get in contact with parents if we have not heard from them. We are required to have an explanation for every absence. If parents do not contact us on day 2 we will telephone and email and text you to get a reason. Non attendance without a reason is still recorded as **N** during this period.

THIRD DAY OF ABSENCE: On the third day of absence if we have not received an explanation we will send a letter home to remind parents about the need for a reason and to request that the reply slip is returned to school. Non attendance is still recorded as **N** during this period.

FOURTH DAY OF ABSENCE: In the case of ILLNESS only

The office will request evidence of illness from **ALL** pupils on the fourth day of their absence (where illness is given as the reason). Parents will be phoned and asked to provide written evidence from their doctor's surgery to prove that the child has seen a doctor. This evidence only needs to be a copy of an appointment card stamped by the surgery reception desk or the patient slip attached to a prescription, issued by a GP practice. A parent note is **NO LONGER** enough evidence after the 3rd day of illness. Parents have the right to not provide us with any evidence however the school then has the right to record any suspicious absences as **N** or **O/G**. It is unfortunate that some families tell the school that their child is ill to allow them to take unauthorised leave during term time.

FIFTH DAY OF ABSENCE: On the fifth day of absence if we have not received an explanation we will send a second and final reminder letter home warning about further action should we receive no information. This letter will come directly from the named adult responsible for attendance and will instruct parents about the next steps that the school will take if the pupil does not return to school or if we receive no acceptable explanation. The next steps will be a home visit by a member of the senior management team, an investigation and can lead to eventual prosecution.

Medical Appointments:

Children's medical appointments should be taken in the evenings and at weekends except in an emergency (e.g hospital appointments). Medical evidence (e.g appointment cards/hospital letter) will need to be produced with each planned absence. In keeping with the requirements of the Equality Duty, pupils who have complex medical needs requiring repeated hospitalisation or appointments will be viewed differently.

Parent appointments are not an authorised reason for pupil absence and parents are expected to make alternative arrangements to ensure that their children are in school and on time.

Religious Observance:

Children are permitted to have an authorised absence in the instance of a religious festival or observance that is a **compulsory part of their faith**. This includes 1 day for Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adha (Islam), 1 day for Diwali (Sikh and Hindu), Rosh Hashanah, Passover and Shavuot (Judaism). Please bear in mind that not all religious festivals and ceremonies are compulsory and those that the Local Authority does not regard as such will not be authorised.

A funeral is not technically a religious observance since it relates to an individual or a family rather than the entire faithful but at St. Mark's Catholic Primary School we allow 1 day authorised absence to attend a funeral of an **immediate** family member.

Cultural events are not religious observances and will be recorded as unauthorised absence if the child is off school

Time off School

We understand that children will get sick and on these occasions we do not expect them to be in school. We would appreciate if parents took time to consider which illnesses actually benefit from time off school and which are not serious enough to warrant the time off.

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School are happy to look after children who require medication. If your child needs medication we have forms to fill in at the school office and we will make all reasonable arrangements to support the administration of vital medications.

We would say that the following list of illnesses and ailments should be a good rule of thumb but none of this advice overrules medical opinion.

- High Temperature – NO SCHOOL as it is usually a sign of infection.
- Infection/Contagion – NO SCHOOL as children pass the infections rapidly between each other but a visit to the doctor is required to determine the infection.
- Flu – NO SCHOOL while the child has a temperature.
- Head Lice – Attendance required once treatment has been applied (which can be overnight after discovery).
- Asthma Attack – NO SCHOOL until breathing is regulated and child feels well. All asthmatic children should have necessary inhalers in school.
- Broken limbs – NO SCHOOL until the permanent cast is put on and then children can attend. We will take all necessary precautions.
- Cuts and scrapes – Attendance required but wounds need to be clean and covered.
- Headache – Attendance required as long as the child has no other symptoms.
- Migraine – Children with Migraine will be receiving treatment from their doctor so follow their advice.
- Coughs and Colds – Attendance required unless the cough goes into a chest infection and a doctor is needed. A cold is a normal childhood illness and will not improve any quicker at home. Coughs can last for many days and vary in severity, so this is not enough reason in itself to stay at home.
- Diarrhoea and vomiting – NO SCHOOL until 24 hours after the symptoms have stopped.
- Stomach Ache – Attendance required depending on the causes of the ache. AS long as there is no raised temperature and no other symptoms.
- Sore Throat – Attendance required.
- Earache – see a doctor. Often attendance is OK once the child is medicated.
- Conjunctivitis – Attendance required once treatment is applied
- Bruises – Attendance required.
- Rashes – see a doctor for diagnosis in case it is infectious. If it is heat rash or allergic reaction the child can still attend school with the necessary treatment. Any rash that may be contagious should be managed at home (eg Slapped Cheek).
- Sickness but no vomiting – Attendance required and we will monitor if you let us know that your child is feeling unwell. If there is any change in their condition we will telephone.
- Allergies – Attendance required so long as we are aware of the allergy and your child has taken whatever medication deemed necessary by your doctor. Please ensure that if your child requires an epipen or Piriton it is in school, in date and that the school has completed a red anaphylaxis card.

Attendance Initiatives

At St. Mark's Catholic Primary School we have introduced a number of initiatives to encourage children and parents to be more aware of the implications of poor attendance and punctuality. Children will take part in annual curriculum activities designed to raise understanding of these issues.

Parents will be kept informed of their child's attendance informally with class teachers, and through newsletters and communication from the school office.

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Attendance certificates are presented weekly to the class achieving the best attendance in the Early Years and Key Stage 1 and in Key Stage 2. We hold termly Attendance Award Celebration events that rewards pupils with good levels of attendance. Parents are invited to these attendance awards and children receive prizes as well as awards.

Attendance and punctuality figures are reported to parents in the school newsletter and in the Head Teacher's report to Governors.

Updated: July 2021

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