



St Peter's C of E (VC) Primary School

Attendance Policy

Success Starts by Being at School

Purpose of Document

The purpose of this document is to set out clearly the LA's Policy on what schools do through the use of a whole-school approach to promoting regular attendance.

Attendance at school is based on a range of statutory requirements. Parents/Carers have the primary responsibility for ensuring those children of compulsory school age receive a suitable education, either by compulsory attendance at school or otherwise. (Section 7 of the Education Act 1996)

These requirements place duties on the Local Authority (LA), who are required, by law, to ensure parents fulfil their responsibility of ensuring that their child receives an education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. This LA duty is delegated to the Attendance Support Team (AST) who work with schools to ensure that all legal interventions relating to school attendance can be accessed.

This LA policy is to support and guide a *School Attendance Policy* which requires commitment from all staff employed within the school, together with governors, parents, pupils and the community in which the school is located.

The Importance of Regular School Attendance

The importance of regular school attendance cannot be overestimated. Regular attendance is a prerequisite to a good education and securing it must therefore be a high priority for school, governors, LAs, parents and the pupils themselves. By failing to attend school regularly, pupils diminish the value of the education provided for them; they may also damage the learning of others because fluctuations in the size of pupil group may restrict the scope for effective teaching.

Attendance is now increasingly regarded as a measure of the quality of the education offered by a school and the government has indicated that all schools should be aiming for a target of at least 97%.

Schools will wish to encourage and promote good attendance in as many ways and for as many pupils as they can, but they will need to balance this with measures to address the needs of those children who do - for whatever reason - find it difficult to attend. A whole-school approach to attendance will focus primarily on promoting attendance but will also address the issue of truancy and condoned absence where it occurs. In addition, schools should ensure that pupils who fall into the 'persistent

absentee' category should be closely monitored and support offered. The threshold for persistent absence currently stands at 90%.

Legal Responsibilities

The legal framework governing attendance is set by the Education Acts and their associated regulations.

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states that:

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient, full time education suitable to his/her age, aptitude and ability and to any special educational needs he/she may have either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

A Framework for a Whole-School Attendance Policy

The framework for a whole-school attendance policy is based on the 5 'Ps' - namely, Philosophy, Principles, Procedures, Performance & Practice.

Philosophy

St Peter's Primary School is committed to providing a full and efficient educational experience to all pupils. We believe that, if pupils are to benefit from education, punctuality and good attendance is crucial. As a school, we will organise and do all we can to ensure maximum attendance for all pupils. Any problems that impede punctuality and regular attendance will be identified and addressed as speedily as possible.

It is the policy of our school to celebrate achievement. Attendance is a critical factor to a productive and successful school career. Our school will actively promote and encourage 100 per cent attendance for all our pupils.

Our school will give a high priority to conveying to parents and pupils the importance of regular and punctual attendance. We recognise that parents have a vital role to play and there is a need to establish strong home-school links and communication systems that can be utilised whenever there is concern about attendance.

If there are problems which affect a pupil's attendance we will investigate, identify and strive in partnership with parents and pupils to resolve those problems as quickly and efficiently as possible. We will adopt a clearly focused approach aimed at returning the pupil to full attendance at all times.

Principles

The school will:

- ensure that all staff are aware of the registration procedures and receive in-service training on registration regulations and education law,
- complete registers accurately at the beginning of each morning and during the afternoon session,

- stress to parents/carers the importance of contacting staff early on the first day of absence,
- promote positive staff attitudes to pupils returning after absence
- consult with all members of the school community and the Attendance Support Team in developing and maintaining the whole-school attendance policy,
- ensure regular evaluation of attendance procedures by senior managers and the school governors,
- work towards ensuring that all pupils feel supported and valued. We will send a clear message that, if a pupil is absent, she/he will be missed,
- have in place procedures which allow absentees to catch up on missed work without disrupting the learning of other class members.

Procedures

If no contact is received from the parents/carers of an absent pupil on the first morning of absence, we will:

- follow 'Every day contact' procedures and contact the parent by telephone, text message or email. If the parent does not respond, two members of staff will attempt contact by visiting the home and deliver a standard letter requesting information,
- consider sending a letter if an explanation has still not been received after three days of unexplained absence or send a School Attendance Letter (SAL),
- refer to the school's nominated attendance person (NAP) to follow up absence if no response is received after 5 days of absence and consider a referral to Family Connect on 01952385385 if no contact can be made with the parent,
- invite the parents into school for an 'Attendance Concern Meeting' (ACM) after a maximum of 10 days absence, unless other action is planned. This meeting should include a senior member of staff, parent, pupil and the NAP/EWO. The aim of this meeting will be to identify and resolve the difficulties which are preventing the pupil from attending school. The parents/carers will be made aware of the legal requirements regarding school attendance,
- Help the pupil's re-integration where a pupil is returning to school after an absence of longer than two weeks. In the event of a pupil returning after a long-term absence then an Individual Reintegration Programme (IRP) will be implemented. The IRP will include all members of the school staff and will be designed to be as supportive of the pupil as possible
- Contact **Family Connect 01952385385** for further guidance on available support.

Lateness

- A pupil's punctuality is a legal requirement and the parents/carers of a pupil who is persistently late are guilty of an offence. The law treats persistent lateness in the same way as irregular attendance and parents can be prosecuted if late arrival, after the register closes, is not resolved.
- Persistent lateness can be as damaging to a pupil's school career as persistent absence. Pupils who arrive late disrupt not only their own education but that of others and being persistently late may also lead to truancy.
- There needs to be a careful balance struck between being too punitive and too accepting of a pupil's lateness. Once the reasons for lateness have been established, the parents, pupil and school need to work in partnership to resolve the difficulties. The dilemma for schools is that, if action is not seen to be taken against latecomers, other pupils may follow suit thereby exacerbating the problem.
- Working with the school community to develop incentive schemes to reward and encourage punctuality could be the focus of one such intervention.

Types of Absence

Authorised Absences

Only the school can authorise an absence. Parents and the LA do not have the power to authorise absences.

The key points the school will consider when deciding to authorise absence are:

- it is a legal requirement that registered pupils of compulsory school age attend regularly and punctually,
- a satisfactory explanation for every absence is required; if one is not forthcoming the absence should be treated as unauthorised,
- the school is not obliged to accept a parental explanation for pupil absence where there is doubt as to the validity of that explanation,
- parents should be aware that only the Headteacher has the discretion to agree to any leave of absence during term time where there are exceptional circumstances. Each application for leave of absence should be considered in view of the specific circumstances of the family.
- The school will always expect regular and punctual attendance, even when the school is aware of family difficulties,
- minding the house, looking after siblings, shopping or going on a trip will not normally be acceptable reasons for absence,

- where absence is authorised, the school will remain vigilant to emerging patterns of non-attendance,
- lateness will be actively discouraged and persistent lateness treated in the same way as irregular attendance,
- the school will develop a close working relationship with the Attendance Support Team in order to promote regular school attendance.

Unauthorised Absences

Unauthorised absence is absence without approval from an authorised representative of the school and includes all unexplained absences.

If a child is absent with the approval of the school, for whatever reason, no offence is deemed to have been committed. Thus, the decision taken by the school to give, or withhold, authorisation for an absence, is a critical factor in determining the LA's decision to prosecute parents.

Leave of Absence during Term Time

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulation 2006 currently allow headteachers to grant leave of absence for the purpose of a family holiday during term time in "special circumstances" of up to five school days leave per year. Headteachers can also grant extended leave for more than five school days in exceptional circumstances.

Any leave of absence during term time can be disruptive both to the child's learning and to the school whether for a family holiday or for any other reason. Schools will only consider leave in term time where both:

- the application is made to the headteacher in advance of the leave by a parent/carer the child normally lives with,
- there are exceptional circumstances, as agreed by the headteacher for the leave.

Applications should be made as far in advance of the leave as possible and parents/carers should speak to the school before they book any holidays. Schools will only agree absence in exceptional circumstances.

How do schools consider leave of absence requests?

While absence may be granted for leave during term time, it is entirely the school's decision and is not a parental right.

Penalty notices for unauthorised absence

Parents could be issued with a penalty notice if their child is absent from school without permission. In Telford & Wrekin, Holiday Penalty Notices (HPN) are issued by the Attendance Support Team to parents who take their children out of school during term time without getting authorisation from the school. The penalty is £60, rising to £120 if not paid within 21 days. If parent/carers fail to pay the penalty fine within 28 days they will be prosecuted.

School staff should investigate each request individually and consider:

- the time of year of proposed leave of absence
- the length and purpose of the leave of absence
- the duration of the leave of absence and its impact on continuity of learning
- the circumstances of the family and the wishes of parents
- the overall attendance pattern of the child

The school will carefully explore with parents why leave of absence is necessary. Where absences are sanctioned, they should be counted as an **authorised** absence.

Where parents fail to abide by the agreement reached with the school and keep a child away from school in excess of the period agreed or, where parents fail to apply for permission, the extra time taken should be treated as an **unauthorised** absence.

All requests for leave of absence should be in writing and the application should be made by a parent with day-to-day care of the child even if they are not actually going on holiday themselves. If the parent with whom the child lives does not give consent to the holiday, leave cannot be given lawfully by the school **except** by a court order.

The school will explain to parents that:

- advanced permission must be agreed
- the absence should be planned carefully with the school
- extended visits, where possible should be made during school holidays
- leave of absence during examination time should be avoided
- children who miss school for six weeks or more fall behind in their school work by a full term
- some children never catch up and will under-perform in their examinations
- their child's name may be removed from the register if he or she has not returned to school within twenty school days of the expected date of return

If absence is agreed, the school will consider:

- the potential educational value of the visit
- the amount of school work missed and how parents and school can help their child catch up on his/her return to school
- going through any work that has been completed by the pupil on return to school