

ATTENDANCE POLICY

ST MARY'S LEWISHAM CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Our Vision

To be a learning community that promotes the unique gifts, wellbeing and potential of every person. Our work is founded on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, building on His message of equality, peace and justice, guided by His words '*As I have loved you, so you must love one another*' (John 13:34).

This policy reflects the visions and aims of St Mary's CE school by encouraging staff, parents and pupils to maximise the learning experience in order to allow all pupils to reach their full potential. This policy aims to provide clear procedures and expectations for pupils, parents and staff relating to school attendance.

Overall aims for our pupils

- Regular and punctual attendance is of paramount importance in ensuring that pupils have full access to the curriculum. In order to achieve this, pupils should have an attendance of at least 96%.
- Pupils should be at school on time (by 08.40am) every day that the school is open, and must arrive on time in order to avoid a late mark. If a child arrives after the register has closed, they will receive an unauthorised absence mark.
- The only acceptable circumstances for lateness and absence would be illness and 'exceptional circumstances'. In this situation it is the responsibility of the parent to phone the school at the earliest possible time to share this information (for illness, by 8:30am on the day of absence).

Definitions

- **Unauthorised absence** - an absence which the school does not consider reasonable such as: Parents keeping the child off school unnecessarily, truancy before or during the school day, absences which have not been properly explained and pupils who arrive too late to school to receive a mark (after 9:30am).
- **Authorised absence** - mornings or afternoons away from school for a reason such as genuine illness or other unavoidable causes (which can be explained through evidence from parents).

Legal Responsibility

- Parent(s) have the legal responsibility to secure their child full time education which meets their needs.
- The school have the legal responsibility to register attendance and notify the Local Authority of absence from school.
- The Local Authority has the legal responsibility to provide education and enforce attendance.

Parental engagement

Parents are expected to understand and adhere to the following:

- Permitting absence from the school without a good reason is an offence by the parent. There is a legal responsibility for parents to ensure their child attends school regularly.
- If your child is reluctant to attend school (showing signs of school refusal) then it is imperative to discuss this issue with the school. Trying to cover up concerns and excuse them from attending to avoid the issue will only make the situation more difficult. Please make the school your first call in this instance and we will work in partnership to support you.
- If any issues with regards to attendance (e.g. family matters) occur, the parent is expected to contact the school at the earliest possible stage and to work with staff to resolve any barriers to the child's learning.
- On the first day of your child's absence you are expected to make contact by 8:30am with a clear reason for the absence.
- There is no entitlement for parents to remove their children in term time for holidays. (Please see below for further information regarding holidays in term time.)
- If your child is leaving the school you are expected to keep the school informed. (Please see below for further information regarding Child Missing Education).

Emergency Contact & First Day Calling Procedures

The school will make checks to ascertain the whereabouts of a child where a pupil has unauthorised absence for 5 consecutive school days with no contact from the parent/carer.

The following checks will be completed before referring to the Local Authority:

- On the first day of a child's absence the school will call the parents if they have failed to make contact.
- If there is no response the school will ring the numbers on the contact list until a reply is received.
- If there is no response, the school will send a text and a home visit will be made if possible.
- If there is no response we will speak to siblings and known relatives within the same education provider or at any other school.
- Liaison with other known professionals who may be working with the family.
- The school has an obligation to make a referral to the MASH team if there are additional safeguarding concerns.

After making the checks mentioned above, a child of compulsory school age is deemed as a Child Missing Education. The Lewisham's Children Missing Education referral form will be completed on the 10th day of absence. The school will contact the Police once all other stages have been completed and there is still no contact regarding the child.

Other School Procedures

- The school produces regular attendance reports which identify irregular or persistent absence, lateness and holidays taken. All attendance concerns (e.g. below 90% attendance) are shared with the governors, the Local Authority's Attendance Officer and the Attendance Team.
- If a child has under 90% attendance the school may request medical evidence of any further absence.
- The school will keep parents informed of attendance issues by sending out attendance and punctuality letters when needed. Where there are concerns, staff will attempt to meet and work with the family in order to improve the child's attendance/punctuality.
- If issues regarding attendance cannot be solved between the school and parent or the parent is not willing to work with the school then the school will be obligated to contact the Attendance Officer and share the relevant information.
- In respect of Nursery places, if attendance is consistently low the school will attempt to make contact with the parents and allow a limited time for attendance to improve. The Headteacher has the discretion to ultimately withdraw the nursery place if attendance does not improve sufficiently.

Role of the Attendance Officer (AO)

The Attendance Officer (AO) works for the Local Authority and their aim is to improve the attendance of pupils in their borough. The AO will try to work with parents to resolve situations which are impacting upon attendance. However, if these methods have been tried and failed (or there is a lack of cooperation), these officers can use court proceedings to prosecute parents or to seek an Education Supervision Order on the child.

Holidays in term time

As stated, parents have no legal entitlement to remove their children during term time for a holiday. However, if you, the parent, do decide to take your child out of school you will need to:

- Complete the 'Leave of absence request' form which is available from the school office (Appendix 1) and return it to the office 14 days before the start date of the absence.
- Clearly state the 'exceptional circumstances' on the form. Please be aware that the governors have agreed that lower costs/cheaper air fares etc. will not be accepted as 'exceptional circumstances'.
- Be aware that completing the form **does not** automatically guarantee the request for leave will be accepted. The Headteacher has the authority to decide whether or not to authorise the absence. The Headteacher will take into account: the reason for the absence, whether the child will miss any preparations for tests, whether the child will miss tests or exams and the child's previous attendance record which includes any patterns of absence.
- You may be required to provide evidence of your flight details.

If you take your child on an unauthorised holiday, a referral will be made to the Attendance Welfare Legal Team, who may choose to prosecute.

If your child fails to return to school after a prolonged period of absence, regardless of whether or not this absence was authorised, your child can be removed from the school roll after 10 days of the agreed return date.

Strategies for promoting excellent attendance

The aim of these strategies is to ensure excellent attendance, over 96%, is promoted throughout the school and remains high profile. St Mary's Primary School rewards excellent attendance and punctuality through:

- **Weekly celebration assemblies** - these are held every week on Friday. The classes with the highest attendance/punctuality receive the attendance rosette which is then displayed on the classroom door of the winning class. This promotes healthy competition between year groups to improve attendance.
- **School Newsletter** - the newsletter is used to highlight the importance of attendance and punctuality. It includes information on rewards and highlights those who have been praised for excellent attendance.
- **Breakfast Club** - breakfast club runs daily in order to support parents by dropping their children off from 7.30am onwards. This removes one of the barriers, particularly for working parents, and allows pupils the chance to gain excellent attendance.
- **Staff promoting good attendance** - teachers will make it commonplace to praise excellent attendance and to encourage whole class participation in achieving the class attendance reward.
- **End of term attendance rewards** - these are given to individuals who have achieved a certain percentage e.g. 100% over the term. There are also more specific awards e.g. for pupils who have achieved 100% for two terms running. These are presented at the end of term assembly by the Headteacher.
- **School curriculum** – our curriculum is vibrant and enriching, which encourages children's love of learning and active participation in school life.
- **Attendance meetings** – Ms Element monitors trends and patterns in attendance and punctuality and these are then shared during attendance meetings. Vulnerable pupils can then also be monitored in order to comply with the existing safeguarding policy.

Children missing education

If your child is leaving the school to either go to another school or to be educated at home (Elective Home Education), parents will be asked to:

- Provide full information regarding the move. This means the date of the move, the new address/town/area if you are moving away, the new school name and start date and the reason for the move.
- Confirm that St Mary's has your current contact details.
- Take St Mary's Primary School contact details so the new school can contact us for the transfer of records.
- Provide a letter setting out your intentions for Elective Home Education.
- Keep us informed through the process.

If the above actions are not taken and we are unable to contact you, then your child is considered to be a **Child Missing Education**. This means that the Local Authority has a legal duty to liaise with other agencies e.g. Children's Services in order to locate your child. By giving the above information, unnecessary investigations can be avoided.

St Mary's School Inclusion team

- Ms L Element - SAO
- Mrs Caroline Maseko – SENCO
- Mrs Marta Tildesley – Family Support Worker
- Mr Matthew Wright – Deputy Headteacher
- Miss Christine Graham - Headteacher

Summary

With the support of all in the community of St Mary's CE Primary School, we will continue to work hard to achieve excellence in our attendance and punctuality. The summary of daily procedures is as follows:

Daily Procedures	By whom
Parents ensure their child is in school on time by 08.40am.	Parent/carer (not older siblings)
Make contact (via phone) by 8:30am if the child is not well or there are 'exceptional' or emergency circumstances.	Parent/carer (again a verbal message from a sibling etc. will not be accepted)
Late arrivals are given a late mark on the register.	School office/admin officer
Pupils arriving after the register has closed are registered as an unauthorised absence for the morning session.	School office/admin officer
Teachers record attendance promptly in the morning to assist the admin officer.	Class teacher
First day absence phone calls are made to the parents who have not made contact with school as asked.	Admin Officer
Written evidence of the reason for absence (e.g. medical appointment), including the date(s) and reason for the absence, to be brought to the office.	Parent/carer

Through parental engagement and the continued hard work of all staff from St Mary's, we will attain our goal of excellence and achieve 96% and above.

APPENDIX: Absence request form



ABSENCE REQUEST FORM

This form should be completed and submitted within four weeks of the start of the proposed leave of absence where possible.

Parents and carers are reminded that leave of absence taken without permission may result in the issuing of fixed penalty fines by the Local Authority of up to £120 per parent per child.

Parents are also reminded that leave of absence for the purpose of holidays in term time cannot be granted save in the most exceptional circumstances.

Please attach a copy of appointment letter/card in the case of medical/dental appointments.

NAME OF CHILD/CHILDREN				
CLASS(ES)				
DATES OF ABSENCE	From:		To:	
DATE OF CHILD'S RETURN TO SCHOOL				
TOTAL NUMBER OF DAYS ABSENT				

REASON FOR REQUESTING TIME OFF DURING TERM TIME:
<i>Please note that the school may request evidence, e.g. appointment card, flight tickets.</i>

OFFICE USE:

PARENT/CARER SIGNATURE		
DATE		
AUTHORISED? (please circle)	YES	NO
HEADTEACHER'S SIGNATURE		
COMMENTS		



Leave of Absence Requests - Guidance

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 make it clear that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are 'exceptional circumstances'.

Headteachers should determine the number of school days that a child can be away from school if the leave is granted for 'exceptional circumstances'.

The school will take the child's previous record of attendance into account when making any decision to authorise absence for a pupil.

The school follows these guidelines in considering any request for absence:

1. The decision to authorise absence is at the Headteacher's discretion based on their assessment of the situation. This will include taking into account the child's attendance and punctuality record for their time at the school.
2. Term time days are for education. This is the priority. Children and families have 175 days off school to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. **Our school policy is that absence will not be granted during term time and will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.**
3. If an event can be reasonably scheduled outside of term time then it would not be normal to authorise absence.
4. Absence during term time for holidays/vacations is therefore not considered an exceptional circumstance and will not be authorised.
5. Absences to visit family members are also not normally granted outside term time if they could be rescheduled for holiday periods or outside school hours.
6. Absence for a bereavement of a close family member may be considered an exceptional circumstance but for the funeral service only, not for extended leave.
7. Absences for important religious observances are often taken into account, but only the ceremony, not extended leave. This is intended for one-off situations rather than regular or recurring events.