




South Lee Prep School
Bury St Edmunds

Attendance Policy September 2024

ISI Reference	
Key Author	Deputy Head
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Signed: 	Steve Honeywood, Chair of Governors 3/9/24
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Attendance Policy

This policy has been drawn up using a range of national documents and guidance, listed at the end of the document.

School attendance is subject to various education laws and this school Attendance Policy is written to reflect these laws and the guidance produced by the Department for Education and Suffolk Council. This Attendance policy is also consistent with the following school policies:

- Admissions
- Child Protection
- Safeguarding
- Special Educational Needs
- Behaviour
- Anti-Bullying

Rationale

For a child to reach their full educational achievement a high level of school attendance is essential.

We are committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all our pupils and endeavour to provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcome. Parents and pupils play a part in making our school so successful. Every child has a right to access the education to which he/she is entitled. Parents and teachers share the responsibility for supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and punctuality for all.

It is our duty to consistently strive to achieve a goal of 100% attendance for all children. Every opportunity will be used to convey to pupils and their parents or carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

For children to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered, it is vital that children are at school on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. The routines children develop around attendance and punctuality at school are the same as the expectations of any future employer in the world of work. High attainment, confidence with peers and staff and future aspirations depend on good attendance.

Good attendance is important because:

- Statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and absence below 95%
- Regular attenders make better progress, both socially and academically
- Regular attenders find school routines, school work and friendships easier to cope with
- Regular attenders find learning more satisfying
- Regular attenders are more successful in transferring between primary school, secondary school, higher education, employment or training

Promoting Good Attendance and Punctuality

The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child.

To do this, we provide information on all matters related to attendance in our regular Parent Briefing email and on our website. We also report to parents on how their child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainments.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Deputy Head, with support from the Heads of Prep and Pre-Prep will oversee, direct and co-ordinate the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and will ensure the Attendance Policy is consistently applied throughout the school. The Deputy Head will also ensure that attendance is both recorded accurately and analysed. They will ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties.

If absence is frequent or continuous, except where a child is clearly unwell, staff will discuss with parent/carers the need and reasons for their child's absence and will encourage them to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a pupil's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence will always rest with the school.

Responsibilities of Classroom Staff:

- Ensure that all pupils are registered accurately;
- Promote good attendance
- Liaise with the Admin Staff on matters of attendance and punctuality; *and*
- Communicate promptly any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a child's absence.

Responsibilities of Children: Attend every day unless they are ill or have an authorised absence.

- Arrive in school on time.
- Take responsibility for registering at the Reception Desk if they are late or are leaving the school site during school hours.

Responsibilities of Parents and Carers:

Ensuring their child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carers legal responsibility (section of the 1996 Education Act) and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

Parents will:

- Make sure that any absence is clearly accounted for by phone on the first and subsequent days of absence (before 9.30am), or by email or letter if a phone is unavailable.
- Discuss with the class teacher any planned absences well in advance.
- Support the school with their child in aiming for 100% attendance each year.
- Avoid taking their child out of school for non-urgent medical or dental appointments.
- Only request leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance.

Recording Attendance

Legally the register must be marked twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day (8.30am) and again for the afternoon session at 2.00pm.

Lateness / Punctuality

It is important to be on time at the start of the morning and afternoon school sessions. The start of lessons are used to give out instructions or organise work. If children are late they can miss work, time with their class teacher getting vital information, cause disruption to the lesson for others and can find being late embarrassing, leading to possible further absence.

- The school day begins at 8.30am and all **pupils are expected to be in school at this time**. Morning registration closes at 9.05am. The afternoon registration closes at 2.00pm.
- All lateness is recorded daily.
- Arrival after the close of registration will be marked as unauthorised absence (code 'U') in line with County and Department for Education (DfE) guidance. This mark shows them to be on site, but is legally recorded as an absence.
- If a pupil is late due to a medical appointment, they will receive an authorised absence coded 'M'. Please be advised that, where possible, doctor and dentist appointments are to be made outside of school hours or during school holidays.

Pupils who are consistently late are disrupting not only their own education but also that of the other pupils. On-going and repeated lateness is considered as **unauthorised absence and will be subject to legal action** (see section 6 for further detail).

Parents, guardians or carers of pupils who have patterns of lateness will be contacted to discuss the importance of good timekeeping and how this might be achieved. If lateness persists, parents, guardians or carers will be invited to attend the school and discuss the problem and support offered. If support is not appropriate or is declined and a child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence due to lateness recorded in any 10 week period the school will seek advice and guidance from the Suffolk Educational Welfare Officer and/or social care if appropriate.

We ask that parents collect children promptly at the end of the school day. Where late collection is persistent and/or significantly late, the school is obliged to take any uncollected pupil to a place of safety and share concerns as necessary with other agencies. If one is available, the school will place a child into the after school club and provide the parent/carer with the bill.

What should parents do if their child is absent?

A child not attending school is considered a safeguarding matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required.

First Day of Absence

If a child is absent, parents must:

- Contact the school before 8.30am or as soon as possible on the first day of absence by telephone or email with an explanation of the absence.

If a child is absent, an Admin Assistant will:

- Contact parents on the first day of absence if the school has not heard from them; *This is because we have a duty to ensure all children's safety as well as their regular school attendance;*
- Invite parents in to discuss the situation with a member of the Senior Leadership Team, if absences persist;
- Refer the matter to the Suffolk Education Welfare Officer if absence is unauthorised and falls below 90%.

Third Day Absence

Please Note: If a child is not seen and contact has not been established with parents or any of the named parent/carers after three days of absence, the school is required to start 'child missing in education procedures' as set down by Suffolk County Council Guidance. The school will make all reasonable enquires to establish contact with parents and the child including making enquires to known friends and wider family. In circumstances of persistent absence the Family Support Worker may visit the family home to try to establish contact.

Ten Day's Absence

The school has a legal duty to report the absence of any pupil who is absent without an explanation for 10 consecutive days. If the child is not seen and contact has not been established with the named parent/carer then the Local Authority is notified that the child is 'at risk of missing'. Children's Services staff will visit the last known address and alert key services to locate the child.

Continued or Ongoing Absence

If a child misses 10% (3 weeks/30 sessions) or more schooling across the school year for whatever reason they are defined as **persistent absentees**. Where this absence is authorised, school will meet with parents/carers in order to ascertain any underlying medical reasons for the level of absence. The school may decide not to authorise any future absences without medical evidence.

The school monitors all absence thoroughly and all attendance data is shared with the Local Authority and the Department for Education. If a child has been absent and their attendance level is falling towards 90%, the school will contact parents. Depending on the reasons for the absence, the school will agree a plan with parents to ensure that attendance improves.

It is vital that children enjoy coming to school and, whilst being encouraged to attend well and on time, will not carry blame and be made to feel unhappy if their parents are not supportive or effective in these areas.

Request for Leave of Absence

The Head is likely to grant permission only in exceptional circumstances.

The Head can determine the length of the authorised absence as well as whether absence is authorised at all. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, or unavoidable which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time.

There are no rules on this as circumstances vary from school to school and family to family. There is, however, no legal entitlement for time off in school time to go on holiday and in the majority of cases holiday will not be authorised. Parents/carers wishing to apply for leave of absence need to ask permission from the Headmistress in advance and before making any travel arrangements.

If term time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised and may be referred to the local authority.

Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking children out during school time.

Understanding types of absence:

Pupils are expected to attend school every day for the entire duration of the academic year, unless there is an exceptional reason for the absence. There are two main categories of absence:

- **Authorised Absence:** is when the school has accepted the explanation offered as satisfactory justification for the absence, or given approval in advance for such an absence. If no explanation is received, absences cannot be authorised.
- **Unauthorised Absence:** is when the school has not received a reason for absence or has not approved a child's leave absence from school after a parent's request. This includes:
 - Parents giving their children permission to be off school unnecessarily, such as for shopping, birthdays, to look after siblings.
 - Absences which have not been explained

A school can, if needed, change an authorised absence to an unauthorised absence and vice versa if new information is presented.

Advice and Guidance for Parents

What should parents do if their child is reluctant to attend school?

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents and the child.

Parents should contact their child's form teacher immediately and openly discuss their worries. Children could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with school work, bullying, friendship problems, family difficulties. It is important to identify the reason for a child's reluctance to attend school and work alongside parents to tackle the problem.

What can parents do to encourage their child to attend school?

Make sure that their child gets enough sleep and wakes up in plenty of time each morning. Ensure that he/she leaves home in the correct clothes and properly equipped.

Be interested in what their child is doing in school - chat to them about the things they have learnt, what friends they have made and even what they had for lunch!

For many parents, their child attending school may be their first experience of being separated from them. This can seem daunting at first for both parents and children, but consistency and a caring supportive home and school life will make the transition a quick and easy experience for everyone.

Leavers

If a child is leaving our school (other than when transferring to secondary school) parents are asked to give the school office comprehensive information about their plans including any date of a move, a new address and telephone numbers, the child's new school and the start date when known. This should be submitted to the school in writing.

If pupils leave and the school do not have the above information, then the child is considered to be a 'Child Missing in Education'. This requires schools and Local Authorities to then carry out investigations to try and locate the child, which includes liaising with Children's Services, the Police and other agencies. By giving the school the above information, these investigations can be avoided.

Absence through competing at regional, county or national level for Sport

Parents of able children can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in a regional, county, national or international event or competition. It is, however, down to the Headmistress' discretion whether to authorise this and they will wish to discuss with parents the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning will continue if absence occurs. Permission for a child to leave early or arrive late to attend coaching and training sessions are also at the discretion of the Headmistress and are not likely to be approved if it is a regular event, unless the sports club or association are providing an education tutor as part of their coaching.

Record preservation

School registers are legal documents. The school will ensure compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for at least three years.