



September 2024

Attendance Policy

Watcombe Primary School



Watcombe Primary School

Attendance Policy

Rationale

Regular attendance is an essential requirement for every pupil. Poor attendance is detrimental to a child's educational progress and to their social and emotional development. It is therefore important that clear school policies are used to deal promptly with the causes of non-attendance.

Purposes

1. To have clear, relevant guidelines for register keeping, which are carefully and routinely carried out by staff.
2. To ensure that good attendance has a high priority with pupils, parents and teachers.
3. To demonstrate clearly stated procedures for swift follow-up when there is a concern about an absence.
4. To recognise that matters relating to the quality of the curriculum and teaching and to the school's ethos and relationships are most significant in encouraging good attendance.
5. To understand the action that can be taken by the Local Authority's Attendance Improvement Service to ensure good attendance.

Rights, Responsibilities and Roles

School

1. All staff will understand the registration process in the school.
2. All registers will be completed accurately at the beginning of each morning and afternoon sessions, and return to the school office promptly.

NB: incomplete or inaccurate registers are unacceptable; they provide a daily record of attendance which may be required in a Court of Law.

3. The school will ensure that clear attendance information is regularly communicated to parents through a variety of media: the school's website, newsletter, school prospectus and parent's meetings.
4. The school will inform parents regularly of attendance figures and annually of the whole school attendance target via the school newsletter.
5. The school will accurately record and monitor all absenteeism and lateness.
6. The school will have clear procedures to identify and follow up all absence and lateness, allocating individual staff roles and responsibilities.
7. The school will annually review its attendance policy and its associated procedures.

Parents

1. Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their child regularly attends the school at which they are registered. Failure to fulfil this duty may result in the Local Authority taking legal action.
2. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their child attends school regularly, punctually, properly dressed and equipped and in a fit condition to learn.
3. Parents are responsible for immediately informing the school of the reason for any absence by phone call on the first morning of any absence and thereafter. This should be at the earliest opportunity.
4. Parents should ensure that the school has an up to date list of contacts, ideally 4 adults (one being the keyholder to the home) who may be called in the case of an unexplained absence / emergency.
5. Parents should take their child on holidays in term time.
6. Parents can expect the school to keep them fully informed of their child's attendance / punctuality record.

Authorised / Unauthorised Absence

All absences must be explained by a parent. The Headteacher will then decide whether or not it will authorise the absence.

Acceptable reasons for the authorisation of absences are:

- Illness
- Exceptional family circumstances such as bereavement
- Days of religious observance
- Unavoidable medical / dental appointments

Illness

Medical evidence may be requested where a child has been absent for 3 days or more due to illness or where a child's attendance is below 96% and/or is regularly away from school due to illness. Failure to provide evidence when requested may result in the absence being unauthorised.

Evidence that is required could be one of the following:

- Proof of GP appointment
- Letter from GP
- Copy of prescription relating to the illness
- School medical card stamped by GP surgery
- Permission given to talk to the doctor e.g. advice sort by parent.

To prevent the spread of Norovirus and any other viral gastroenteritis illnesses, which is characterised by the sudden onset of vomiting and/or diarrhoea, on the advice of Public Health England children stay away from school until they have been free of symptoms for at least 48 hours and avoid contact with others where possible.

Further information regarding when to keep your child off school can be found at:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/#:~:text=If%20your%20child%20has%20mild,they%20can%20go%20to%20school.>
- <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2024/01/03/a-parents-guide-to-keeping-kids-healthy-this-school-year/>

School will act in accordance with Public Health England advice and recommended actions with undiagnosed conditions.

Unavoidable medical / dental appointments

All routine (non-emergency) appointments should, wherever possible outside of school hours. Should a pupil need to have an appointment during school hours, evidence of this appointment will need to be provided. Failure to provide evidence may result in the school unauthorizing the absence.

Leave of Absence

As of 1st September 2013, headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. The Headteacher is unable to authorise any leave of absence to any children with attendance below 96%. This will be measured over a 12 month period prior to the date of application.

Absence request should be submitted to the headteacher at the earliest possible opportunity for approval. Requests must include all details as to why the absence would be deemed an exceptional circumstance. Absence requests must be submitted on the Absence Request Form, available on the school website or from the school office.

All absence request forms will be considered on a case by case basis and only authorised where there are exceptional circumstances.

Absences will not be authorised for:

- Holidays
- Birthdays
- Shopping
- Looking after family members
- Visiting relatives / family events unless relatives are of the first or second degree.

If the absence is unauthorised and the absence is still taken, the school may request the Local Authority to consider issuing a Penalty Notice to the parents/carers for the unauthorised absence.

If the absence request is not agreed you have the right to appeal. You may appeal to the Governors in writing (addressed to the Chair of the Children and Curriculum Committee) with 10 days of receiving notification below (as on the Request for Authorisation of Absence Form). Please state fully the reason(s) for your appeal and enclose any additional documentation and support evidence that you feel may help your case e.g. medical evidence/letters from employers.

If the decision to unauthorize the leave of absence is upheld, and the absence is still taken the school will send in a request for the issuing of a Penalty Notice, to the Local Authority, who will then make the final decision about whether a Penalty Notice should be issued.

If no absence request is made:

If a child is absent from school during term time and no prior absence request has been made, the school will write to the parents/carers to inform them that the absence has not been authorised and that a Penalty Notice may be issued by the Local Authority.

If the parents/carers can demonstrate that the child's absence during this was due to an exceptional circumstance and that an absence request could not have been made in advance of the said absence, then a Penalty Notice will not be issued.

'All state funded schools must consider whether a penalty notice is appropriate in each individual case where one of their pupils reaches the national threshold for considering a penalty notice. **Schools should not have a blanket position of issuing or not issuing penalty notices** and should make judgements on each individual case to ensure fairness and consistency across the country. **The threshold is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks. A school week means any week in which there is at least one school session.** This can be met with any combination of unauthorised absence (e.g. 4 sessions of holiday taken in term time plus 6 sessions of arriving late after the register closes all within 10 school weeks). These sessions can be consecutive (e.g. 10 sessions of holiday in one week) or not (e.g. 6 sessions of unauthorised absence taken in 1 week and 1 per week for the next 4 weeks). The period of 10 school weeks can also span different terms or school years (e.g. 2 sessions of unauthorised absence in the Summer Term and a further 8 within the Autumn Term).

When a school becomes aware that the threshold has been met, they are expected to make the following considerations to decide whether to issue a penalty notice in each individual case:

- Is support appropriate in this case?
- If yes, schools are expected to continue with the existing support without a penalty notice or issue a Notice to Improve if that support is not working or is not being engaged with. A penalty notice can be issued if either has not worked.
- If no, for example a holiday in term time, a penalty notice should be issued subject to the other conditions below.
- Is a penalty notice the best available tool to improve attendance and change parental behaviour for this particular family or would further support or one of the other legal interventions be more appropriate?
- Is issuing a penalty notice in this case appropriate after considering any obligations under the Equality Act 2010 such as where a pupil has a disability?
- **(For local authorities only)** Is it in the public interest to issue a penalty notice in this case given the local authority would be responsible for any resulting prosecution for the original offence in cases of non-payment?

If the answer to those questions is yes, then a penalty notice should be issued. If not, another tool or legal intervention should be used to improve attendance.

Penalty Notices

A penalty notice is an out of court settlement which is intended to change behaviour without the need for criminal prosecution. If repeated penalty notices are being issued and they are not working to change behaviour they are unlikely to be most appropriate tool.

Therefore, from autumn term 2024, only 2 penalty notices can be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within a 3 year rolling period and any second notice within that period is charged at a higher rate:

1. The first penalty notice issued to a parent in respect of a particular pupil will be charged at £160 if paid within 28 days. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days.
2. A second penalty notice issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil is charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.
3. A third penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within 3 years of the date of issue of the first. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time (or subsequent times) within those 3 years, alternative action should be taken instead. This will often

include considering prosecution but may include other tools such as one of the other attendance legal interventions.

Once 3 years has elapsed since the first penalty notice was issued a further penalty notice can be issued, but in most cases it would not be the most effective tool for changing what may have now become an entrenched pattern of behaviour.

Procedures for following up absence / lateness

First Day Reporting

- Parents are reminded of first day contact procedure at the beginning of each term via the school newsletter.
- On the first day of absence the parent / carer should ring school at their earliest opportunity but before 9am to inform the office that their child will be absent and give a reason for the absence. An indication of the likely period of absence is requested. A message can be left on the absence mailbox on the school phone system; via email or through School Spider.
- The Admin Team keep a record of absence calls and reasons received each day.
- Class registers are submitted electronically to the admin office so any absenteeism can be followed up
- If any member of staff is concerned about an absence they will liaise with the admin team to clarify any reasons of knowledge for the absence. If they are still concerned they will relay to the Headteacher, Deputy or Family Mentor.
- Between 9am and 9:30am the Admin Team will phone in the first instance and then text if necessary the parents of any pupil whose absence is unexplained and on each consecutive day that the absence remains unexplained.
- If no contact is made with the parent/carer and so no reason is given for the absence, the school will call any other contacts that have been provided.
- If a child is absent without any reason and there is concern for their welfare, a member of staff may visit the home address.
- If the school has concerns about the child's whereabouts and wellbeing, the school will contact the Torbay Education Safeguarding Service (TESS) for advice.
- Where a child / family have Children's Service involvement, Children's Services will be informed.
- If after 10 days, the child has continued unauthorised absence, a Child Missing from Education (CME) referral will be made to the Attendance Improvement Service.

If the pupil is subject to a Child Protection Plan or if the school has a particular safeguarding concern(s) and feel the child is at risk of immediate harm, the school will immediately notify the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) without waiting for the 10 school days.

A child may be referred to the MASH if it is considered that they have totally disengaged from learning and/or the parent is subject to statutory intervention.

Lateness

There are two negative results caused by pupils who constantly arrive late. These are:

- The loss of education suffered by the pupil which over a year can add up to a significant proportion of their time in school.
- The disruption to other pupils in their class as the teacher's attention is taken from the task at hand.

The strategies that the school will use to tackle lateness will include:

- School gates will be locked at 9am promptly.
- Pupils who arrive after 9am are required to enter through the main entrance.
- Pupils who arrive after registration will be considered as 'late, after registers close' and coded – U.
- All teachers will record the appropriate late mark in the registers and these will be entered into SIMs.
- Late gates will be implemented on a regular basis.
- All pupils' attendance records will be checked every half term for lates before registers close (L) and lates after registers close (U).
- Where either/or these late arrivals culminate to 5 or more in a half term the school will write to parents/carers of the pupil in question to discuss any support needs and ways of accessing support with the Family Mentor.
- Parents / Carers of those children logged as persistently arriving late receive a letter inviting them to meet with the Family Mentor in an attempt to rectify the situation.

Managing Poor Attendance

All pupils with attendance below 96% will be analysed regularly by the school. Persistent absentees (10% absence or above) and those pupils at risk of becoming persistent absentees are subject to the following actions:

- School will offer support and issue **Attendance Letter 1** advising the parent that their child's attendance has dropped below 96%, the impact of this absence and reminding parents of the need to work to improve their child's attendance.
- School will offer support and issue **Attendance Letter 2** if attendance has not improved, inviting parents/carers into a meeting with Family Mentor
- School will offer support and issue **Attendance Letter 3** if parents / carers do not attend the meeting and / or there is still no improvement following Attendance letters 1 and 2, inviting parents / carers into a meeting with the Headteacher.
- School will continue to offer support, however if there is no improvement and no clear rationale or exceptional circumstance exists for the continued poor attendance then a **Notice to Improve** instruction will be issued.
- School will offer support, however if no improvement and no clear rationale or exceptional circumstance then a **referral** will be made to the **Attendance Improvement Service and a Penalty Notice Issued.**
- Pupils / families identified as persistently absent without mitigating factors, will be subject to an Attendance Action Plan.

Medical Letter

If your child's attendance is below 96% and illness is the main contributing factor affecting their attendance you may receive a medical letter inviting you to make an appointment with the School Nurse Service for advice and support. This letter will also request that medical evidence be provided for any future absences that relate to illness. Failure to provide such evidence as, one of the following, may result in the absence being unauthorised:

- Date and signed GP appointment card
- Letter from GP
- Copy of prescription relating to the illness

If, at any time, a pupil has 10 or more absence sessions (half days) unauthorised absences equating to 10% within a 6 month period, the school may attend a legal consultation with the Local Authority.

Working Together to Improve Attendance

In line with, Working Together to Improve Attendance May 2022 guidance, the school will always consider each pupils absence on a case by case basis and will take into account any contextual factors which could be having an impact on the child's attendance. Where possible, the school will seek to understand these factors and provide support and/or challenge as deemed appropriate by the Attendance Team / Headteacher.

Strategies for Supporting Families

At Watcombe Primary School, we endeavour to support families overcome any challenges they may be facing with attendance. Every case is different, but where we have capacity, our support may consist of one of or all of the following strategies:

- Time / discussion with the family mentor, teaching assistant or class teacher (informally or formally)
- Regular check ins for the child in the classroom
- Special responsibilities in the classroom
- Early Start permission
- Alternate entry / exit point
- Concessions over uniform expectations (where SEND need is clearly evident)
- Reward charts / systems installed
- Meet and greet by a member of staff
- Invited to Breakfast Club
- Time / discussion with SENDCO / SLT
- Referral to outside agencies, including Early Help or Medical Referrals
- Team Around Family Meeting (TAF)
- Home Visit (capacity dependent)
- Engagement with Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO)
- Possible MASH referral.
- Various other reasonable adaptations to in school provision and curriculum.

Strategies for Promoting Attendance

- Half-Termly Attendance Certificates
 - 99% or above
 - Anyone with improving attendance on the previous half term
- Improvement letter to parents, where attendance letters 1,2 or medical have been received and there has been a subsequent improvement in attendance.
- Individual certificates (usually for those with persistent absence)
- Inter-class attendance competition – fortnightly
- Support from school staff e.g.
 - Advice from Family Mentor or class teachers around SEND or Behaviour issues
 - Teachers could create leadership responsibilities for pupils in school; allow early access to classroom and regular check in with key staff.
- Regular communication with parents
 - Advice around absence e.g. when child can come to school

Collection of Attendance Data

On a fortnightly basis, the school will analyse the results of the latest data and take the appropriate actions as per the policy.

Review

The Attendance Policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.