



Policy for Attendance and Punctuality

- **This document is the policy for attendance and Punctuality at Greatstone Primary School**
- **This policy was reviewed and adopted during the Spring Term 2020**
- **The Document will be reviewed annually.**
- **Next Review Spring 2021.**

Greatstone Primary School Attendance Policy

Introduction

We are a welcoming, caring community where everyone associated with our school feels involved and valued. We strive always to motivate our children in a secure and stimulating environment to fulfil their potential in all areas of the curriculum and school life. We offer a broad and balanced curriculum, giving the children every opportunity to develop and extend their particular abilities and strengths. To enable us to achieve these aims, regular and punctual school attendance is important. Pupils need to attend school regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them by law. Greatstone Primary School fully recognises its responsibilities to ensure pupils are in school and on time, therefore having access to learning for the maximum number of days and hours.

Our policy applies to all children registered at this school and this policy is made available to all parents/carers of pupils who are registered at our school on our school website.

This policy has been written to adhere to the relevant Children Acts, Education Acts, Regulations and Guidance from the Department for Education in addition to guidance from the Local Authority.

Although parents/carers have the legal responsibility for ensuring their child's good attendance, the Headteacher and Governors at our school work together with other professionals and agencies to ensure that all pupils are encouraged and supported to develop good attendance habits. Procedures in this policy are followed to ensure this happens.

Children who are persistently late or absent soon fall behind with their learning. Children who are absent from school frequently develop large gaps in their learning which will impact on their progress and their ability to meet age related learning expectations. A child whose attendance drops to 90% each year will, over their time at primary school, have missed two whole terms of learning.

Aims and Objectives

This attendance policy ensures that all staff and governors in our school are fully aware of and clear about the actions necessary to promote good attendance.

Through this Policy we aim to:

- Improve pupils' achievement by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality.
- Achieve a minimum of 95% attendance for all children, apart from those with chronic health issues.
- Create an ethos in which good attendance and punctuality are recognised as the norm and seen to be valued by the school.
- Raise awareness of parents/carers and pupils of the importance of uninterrupted attendance and punctuality at every stage of a child's education.
- Ensure that our policy applies to Reception aged children in order to promote good habits at an early age.
- Work in partnership with pupils, parents/carers, staff, our local delivery group's school liaison officer and the KCC Inclusion and Attendance Service, so that all pupils realise their potential, unhindered by unnecessary absence.
- Promote a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which pupils feel safe, secure, and valued, and encourage in pupils a sense of responsibility.
- Establish a pattern of monitoring attendance and ensure consistency in recognising achievement and dealing with difficulties.
- Recognise the key role of all staff, but especially class teachers, in promoting good attendance.
- We maintain and promote good attendance and punctuality through:
 - Raising awareness of attendance and punctuality issues among all staff, parents/carers and pupils.
 - Ensuring that parents/carers have an understanding of the responsibility placed on them for making sure their child attends regularly and punctually.
 - Equipping children with the life skills needed to take responsibility for good school attendance and punctuality appropriate to the child's age and development.
 - Maintaining effective means of communication with parents/carers, pupils, staff and governors on school attendance matters.
 - Developing and implementing procedures for identifying, reporting and reviewing cases of poor attendance and persistent lateness.
 - Supporting pupils who have been experiencing any difficulties at home or at school which are preventing good attendance.
 - Developing and implementing procedures to follow up non-attendance at school

Definitions

Authorised absence

- An absence is classified as authorised when a child has been away from school for a legitimate reason and the school has received notification from a parent or carer. For example, if a child has been unwell and the parent telephones the school to explain the absence.
- Only the school can make an absence authorised. Parents/carers do not have this authority. Consequently not all absences supported by parents/carers will be classified as authorised.

Unauthorised absence

- An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of the school.
- Therefore the absence is unauthorised if a child is away from school without good reason, even with the support of a parent.

Procedures

Our school will undertake to follow the following procedures to support good attendance:

- To maintain appropriate registration processes.
- To maintain appropriate attendance data.
- To communicate clearly the attendance procedures and expectations to all staff, governors, parents/carers and pupils.
- To have consistent and systematic daily records which give detail of any absence and lateness.
- To follow up absences and persistent lateness if parents/carers have not communicated with the school.
- To inform parents/carers what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absence.
- To strongly discourage unnecessary absence through holidays taken during term time.
- To work with parents/carers to improve individual pupils attendance and punctuality
- To refer to the School Liaison Officer, any child whose attendance causes concern and where parents/carers have not responded to school initiatives to improve.
- To report attendance statistics to Kent LA and the DfE where requested.
- All staff should be aware that they must raise any attendance or punctuality concerns to the Senior Leadership Team.

Responsibilities

All members of school staff have a responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and punctuality. The following includes a more specific list of the kinds of responsibilities which individuals might have.

Class teacher

Class teachers are responsible for:

- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/carers
- Informing the Senior Leadership Team
- Monitoring follow-up once actions have been taken to correct attendance concerns
- Emphasising with their class the importance of good attendance and promptness
- Discussing attendance issues at parent meetings where necessary

Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- Overall monitoring of school attendance
- Trends in authorised and unauthorised absence
- Identifying any attendance trends/concerns regarding inclusion groups. The Inclusion leader monitors this closely, looking at actions and impact to improve attendance where there are any group trends below school and National expectation.
- Contacting families where concerns are raised about absence including arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised
- Making referrals to the KCC Inclusion & Attendance Service
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion with the school's Liaison Officer
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence.

Administration staff

Staff in the School Office are responsible for:

- Collating and recording registration and attendance information.
- Taking and recording messages from parents/carers regarding absence
- Ensuring the Absence/Late Book is completed
- Contacting parents/carers of absent children where no contact has been made.
- Recording details of children who arrive late or go home
- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/carers and reporting concerns to the Headteacher
- Sending out standard letters regarding attendance

Parents/Carers

Parents/Carers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually unless prevented from doing so by illness or attendance at a medical appointment.
- Contacting the school office either by telephone, e-mail or ParentMail by 9.30am on the first morning of absence, and again if their child is still absent after 3 days to update us on their progress and advise when s/he is likely to return to school.
- Informing the school in advance of any medical appointments in school time. For the absence to be recorded as a medical absence we do require evidence from the doctor or dentist. (Appointment card/letter)
- Making requests for authorised absence in term time, only if absolutely necessary as these are not automatically authorised.
- Talking to the school as soon as possible about any child's reluctance to come to school so that problems can be quickly identified and dealt with.

Registration

Gates open at 8.45. Children proceed to class and all children are expected to be in school by 9am. Each class teacher has the responsibility for keeping an accurate record of attendance. Any pupil who is absent must be recorded at the beginning of the morning and afternoon session. The attendance register must be completed by the class teacher and returned promptly to the school office. (Attendance code / and \ for pupils who are present). All attendance records are documented using SIMs software, which is supported by the Local Authority. Attendance registers are legal documents and these must be kept secure and preserved for a period of three years after the date they were last used.

Lateness

Once the school gates are locked closed at 9.00am the only way to get into school is via the school office. Any pupil who comes into school this way after 9.00am and before 9.30am will be marked as late in the attendance record. Records are kept of those pupils who are late; this is documented on the electronic register for each pupil (Attendance code L). Any child who arrives for school later than 9.30 will be marked as having an unauthorised absence for the morning. (Attendance code U).

Children who have attended a dentist or doctor's appointment and subsequently come to school later than 9.00am will have the absence recorded as a late but with medical absence (Attendance code L with comment). If they arrive after 10.00am or 14.00pm for medical appointments, this will be recorded as a medical absence (Attendance code M).

Children who are persistently late miss a significant amount of learning, often the most important aspect, as the beginning of the day is where the teacher explains the learning and what each child is expected to achieve.

Where there have been persistent incidents of lateness parents/carers will receive a letter advising them of the concerns and the school will provide opportunities for parents/carers to seek support and advice to address these issues.

Absences

Parents/carers should contact the school office either by telephone, e-mail or ParentMail on the first day of their child's absence by 9.30 am. When parents/carers notify us of their child's absence it is important that they provide us with details of the reason for their absence.

All absences are recorded as either authorised or unauthorised absences on the computer. It is important that we receive accurate information from parents/carers with reasons for the child's absence. This information is used to determine whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised. The Headteacher has the responsibility to determine whether absences are authorised or unauthorised.

The following reasons are examples of absences that will not be authorised:

- Persistent non-specific illness e.g. poorly/unwell
- Absence of sibling if one child is ill
- Oversleeping
- Inadequate clothing/uniform
- Confusion over school dates
- Medical/dental appointments of more than half a day without very good reasons
- Child's/family birthday
- Shopping trip
- Family holidays (with some rare exceptions)

First Day Contact

Where a child is absent from school and we have not received any verbal or written communication from the parent, then we initiate a first day contact process. Office staff review all of the registers from 9.00am to 10.30am on a daily basis, to identify those pupils who are absent. There are occasions when we are unaware why the child is absent and we will contact the parent to check the reasons for the child's absence. If we are unable to obtain a legitimate reason, then the absence will be unauthorised (Attendance code O). In the interests of safeguarding, the Local Authority School Liaison Officer may make a 'cold' house call to confirm safety and to try to ascertain a reason for the child's absence.

If a child is absent for 5 days or more, this will not be authorised without medical evidence as there have been occasions when children have been on holiday but parents/carers have reported this as illness.

If the absence is not authorised and the holiday is taken anyway, the case may be referred to the Inclusion and Attendance Service who may issue a Penalty Notice to each parent for each child taken out of school.

Illness

If the absence is likely to continue for an extended period, or be a repetitive absence, the school will contact the support services to see if arrangements can be made for the child to be given some home tuition outside school.

Where over the course of an academic year, a child has repeated periods of illness, the school will write to parents/carers to ask them to provide medical evidence for each future period of illness related absence. This evidence could be a Doctor's note, appointment card or copy of a prescription. The school may seek written permission from parents/carers to make their own enquiries.

Parental Request for Absence from School for Holiday

With effect from September 2013 the government abolished the right of headteachers to authorise absence specifically for holidays of up to 10 days per year if special circumstances exist. Instead, headteachers will only be allowed to grant leave of absence for any reason if they are satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist.

The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short. And by 'unavoidable' it implies that an event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. It is important to note that Headteachers can agree the absence of a child in exceptional circumstances but this must be requested 2 weeks in advance of the proposed leave and agreement to each request is at the discretion of the headteacher, acting on behalf of the Governing Body (Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulation 2006). Pupil's previous record of attendance is taken into account when the school is making decisions and each case will be judge on its merits. The headteacher's decision is final. Once the decision not to authorise leave is taken, it cannot be authorised retrospectively.

If the absence is not authorised and the holiday is taken anyway, the case maybe referred to the Inclusion and Attendance Service who may issue a Penalty |notice to each parent for each child taken out of school.

Children Missing Education

Children missing from education can mean either a child being unenrolled or a child on extended absence. When a child is missing from education, Local Authority guidance will be followed, by completing a Child Missing Education referral for the following circumstances

- If the whereabouts of the child is unknown and the school have failed to locate him/her.
- The family has notified the school they are leaving the area but no Common Transfer Form (pupil file) has been requested by another school.

Addressing Attendance Concerns

The school expects attendance of at least 95%. From September 2015, the Government have set the threshold for persistent absenteeism at 90%.

It is important for children to establish good attendance habits early on in their primary school career. It is the responsibility of the Headteacher and the governors to support good attendance and to identify and address attendance concerns promptly. In primary school we rely upon parents/carers to ensure their child attends school regularly and punctually and therefore where there are concerns regarding attendance parents/carers are always informed of our concerns. Initially concerns about attendance are raised with parents/carers via letters which are sent home.

- If a child's attendance drops below the school target of 95% then parent/carers will receive a letter from school to make them aware that this is the case.
- If a child's attendance drops below 92% they will be asked to meet with the Headteacher.
- If a child's attendance drops below 90% this will be classed, by Kent, as persistent absence. The parent will be asked to meet with the Headteacher and further action may be taken including the referral to the KCC Inclusion and Attendance Service.

There will be opportunities for the parent/carer to discuss reasons for absence and support to be given by the school with the aim to improve attendance. Where a child's attendance record does not improve over a period of time then the school has a responsibility to make a referral to the KCC Inclusion Attendance Service.

The KCC Inclusion and Attendance Service will issue penalty notices to parents/carers where there has been a referral from the school as part of the school's processes to address poor attendance patterns.

In addition, education supervision orders are available by direct application by LA to the Magistrates' Court as an ancillary order following a successful prosecution by the LA for irregular attendance or breach of a school attendance order.

Monitoring Attendance

Our office staff have the responsibility for ensuring that all of the attendance data is accurately recorded on the SIMs attendance software. Regular meetings are held with the Headteacher to discuss all attendance concerns and appropriate actions are taken following these meetings such as letters sent to parents/carers or meetings arranged to discuss attendance concerns with parents/carers. We work closely with our School Liaison Officer. Concerns about attendance are usually very effectively resolved with this support. Early intervention usually means that the involvement of the KCC Inclusion and Attendance Service, can be avoided. The school is always keen to communicate with parents/carers to support good attendance.

Penalty Notice Proceedings

Lateness

Penalty Notices are issued in accordance with Kent County Council's Education Penalty Notices Code of Conduct effective from January 2016, as revised in April 2017, when:

- 10 incidents of late arrival after the registers have closed during any possible 100 school sessions leads to a Penalty Notice Warning Letter
- The Penalty Notice Warning Letter sets out 15 school days during which no unauthorised absence is to be recorded
- If unauthorised absence is recorded during the 15 day period, a Penalty Notice(s) will be issued (one per parent per child)

Where a Penalty Notice is not paid within 28 days of issue the Local Authority will instigate court proceedings

Poor Attendance

Penalty Notices are issued in accordance with Kent County Council's Education Penalty Notices Code of Conduct effective from January 2016, as revised in April 2017, when:

- A Penalty Notice can only be issued in cases of absence for 10 or more half day sessions (5 school days) without authorisation during any 100 possible school sessions or period of 50 days of schooling – these do not need to be consecutive.
- A Penalty Notice can only be issued in cases of absence for 10 or more half day sessions (5 school days) without authorisation during any 100 possible school sessions or period of 50 days of schooling – these do not need to be consecutive.
- A Penalty Notice can also be issued where an excluded child is found in a public place during school hours.
- After the appropriate request for a Penalty Notice is received, the KCC Inclusion and Attendance Service will issue a warning letter setting out 15 school days during which no unauthorised absence is to be recorded.
- If unauthorised absence is recorded during the 15 day period a Penalty Notice will be issued (one per parent per child)

Where Penalty Notices are imposed, the regulations state that the penalty will be £120 to be paid within 28 days, reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days. Penalty Notices are issued to each parent of each child. Failure to pay the penalty in full by the end of the 28 day period will result in prosecution by the Local Authority.

Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 says that parents/carers are **guilty** of an offence of failing to secure regular attendance at school unless they can prove that the child was absent:

- With leave (the school has given permission)
- Due to sickness or any unavoidable cause (the sickness or unavoidable cause must relate to the child, not the parent)
- Religious observance
- Failure by the Local Authority to provide transport

In law, these are the only acceptable reasons for a child being absent from school.