

Last review: September 2020
Review date: September 2021
Signed By:
Approval Committee: Governing Body



GILLINGHAM SCHOOL
Hardings Lane, Gillingham
Dorset SP8 4QP

ATTENDANCE FOR PUPILS
POLICY

Section 1: Rationale:

Partnerships between our pupils, their parents and carers, class teachers/ tutors, the Head of Year, and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), are vital in securing excellent attendance for all and the best possible progress for pupils.

We believe passionately that every child has a right to access the education to which he/she is entitled. Parents, carers and all colleagues in school share the responsibility for ensuring that attendance at school is maximized and that unjustified and unauthorised absenteeism is kept to a minimum.

High levels of attendance at school significantly impact upon academic and developmental outcomes.

The law relating to school attendance states in Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 that the parent/carer of every child of compulsory school age* shall cause him/her to receive fulltime education suitable:

- a. to their age, ability and aptitude and
- b. to any additional educational needs he/she may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

(the Supreme Court ruling on 6th April 2017 stated that 'regularly' means 'in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school')

**Compulsory school age begins at the start of the term following the child's 5th birthday and ends on the last Friday in June of the school year when they reach 16. From September 2015 all 16 year olds will be required to continue in education or training until their 18th birthday.*

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 our colleagues, our pupils and their parents or carers the importance of regular attendance.

Good or better 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 and higher education, employment or training.

Section 2: Promoting Good Attendance & Punctuality

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

To help us all to focus on this we will:

- Report to parents/carers on how their child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainment;
- Celebrate good attendance by displaying individual, Tutor Group, and Year Group achievements;
- Reward good or better and improving attendance through school competitions and rewards;
- Set targets for the school and for Years/ Tutor Groups for attendance;
- Conduct meetings with parents and carers, pupils and colleagues to work together on raising attendance levels individually, by groups and across the school.

2.1 Roles and Responsibilities:

A member of SLT 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. This person will also ensure that attendance is both recorded accurately and analysed. (S)he will work alongside the Attendance Manager to 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, colleagues will discuss with parents/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 rests with the school.

Responsibilities of a Class Teacher/Tutor are to:

- Ensure that all pupils are registered accurately;
- Promote & reward good attendance with pupils at all appropriate opportunities;
- Note trends of absence at individual and key group level and liaise with Head of Year on interventions.

Responsibilities of a Head of Year are to:

- Liaise with the Attendance Manager on matters of attendance and punctuality;
- Promote & reward good attendance with pupils at all appropriate opportunities;

- Communicate any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a child's absence and to monitor any safeguarding issues;
- Track attendance trends by tutor group and by key groups/bands of attainment, and set priorities for intervention with the Tutor Team/SLT link.

Responsibilities of Pupils are to:

- Attend every day unless they are ill or have an authorised absence;
- Arrive in school on time;
- Go to all their class/tutor times and lessons on time;
- In the sixth form, take responsibility for signing out in Reception if they are late or are leaving the school site during school hours.

Responsibilities of Parents and Carers:

Ensuring a child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carer's legal responsibility and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

Parents and carers will:

- Inform the school on the first day of absence;
- Discuss with the Deputy Head responsible any planned absences well in advance;
- Support the school with their child in aiming for 100% attendance each year;
- Make sure that any absence is clearly accounted for by a phone message left on the absence line or written note;
- 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 and complete the relevant form for the attention of the Deputy Head Teacher;
- **Provide medical evidence to support reasons for absence when requested by the school.**

Duties of the Local Authority (LA)

The local authority has statutory powers to bring legal action against parents/carers who:

- Fail to ensure regular attendance at school of a registered pupil
- Fail to ensure their child is receiving a suitable education – either by regular attendance at school or at a place where alternative provision is provided for them.

The School Attendance Service

The School Attendance Service aims to:-

- Establish consistent county-wide legal advice and action on school attendance
- Offer advice, support and guidance to schools on whole school approaches to attendance
- Provide advice and support to school staff on school specific issues and individual cases
- Seek and share good attendance practice

Relevant legislation

Only local authorities can prosecute parents/carers.*

**In education law, and for the purposes of this document, the definition of a parent is as described in The Education Act 1996, Section 576. A parent means:*

- *All natural parents, whether they are married or not*
- *Any person who has parental responsibility for a child or young person, and*
- *Any person who has care of a child or young person i.e. lives with and looks after the child.*

The local authority and school will need to decide who comes within the definition of parent/carer in respect of a particular pupil when using the legal measures, but generally parents/carers include all those with day-to-day responsibility for a child.

Section 3: Recording Attendance:

Legally the register must be marked twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day and again for the afternoon session:

If a pupil arrives in their tutor time between 9.00 am and 9.20 am the attendance will be registered as L. If a pupil has not arrived in their tutor by 9.20 am, they will be registered as N.

3.1 Lateness /Punctuality

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

- **The school day begins at 9.00 am and all pupils are expected to be in school at the appropriate time.**
- All lateness is recorded daily. This information will be required by the courts, should a prosecution for non-attendance or lateness be necessary.

- Arrival after the close of registration will be marked as unauthorised absence code 'U' in line with county and DfE guidance. This mark shows them to be on site, but is legally recorded as an absence.
- If a pupil is frequently arriving after the attendance register has closed, the parent/carer is committing an offence by failing to ensure that the child is receiving full-time education and the parent/carer may therefore be issued with a Penalty Notice or prosecuted under the Education Act 1996, Section 444.
- If a pupil is late due to a medical appointment, they will receive an authorised absence coded 'M'. Please be advised that where possible doctors and dentists 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 can be subject to legal action (see section 6 for further details).

Parents and carers of pupils who have patterns of lateness will be contacted to discuss the importance of good time keeping and how this might be supported and achieved. If lateness persists parents and carers will be invited to discuss the problem and ways to support. 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 12 week period it may result in Dorset County Council issuing parents/carers with a penalty notice in accordance with Dorset CC policy for issuing penalty notices for non-attendance (See section 6 of this policy for further details).

Section 4: Parents' and Carers' Information: What to do if my child is absent?

First Day Absence:

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

If your child is absent you must:

- Contact the school on the morning of the first day of absence via the absence line. Information received by Phone is used to update the registers.

If your child is absent we may:

- Telephone or text you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you. This is because we have a duty to ensure your child's safety as well as their regular school attendance;
- Invite you in to discuss the situation with our Attendance Manager and/or Head of Year. If the absences persist;
- Refer the matter to the School Attendance Panel if absence is unauthorised and falls below 90%.

Ten Day's Absence:

We have 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 being missing'. Children's Services Staff will visit the last known address and alert key services to locate the child. Parents/carers have a responsibility to ensure their contact details are up to date.

Continued or On-going Absence:

If your child misses 10% (3 weeks / sessions) or more schooling across the school year for whatever reason they are defined as a persistent absentee. Whether this absence is authorised/unauthorised, the school may invite parent/carers to discuss the issues and agree an action plan to support the parent/carer/child.

Request for Leave of Absence:

Amendments to school attendance regulations were updated and enforced from September 2013 thus:

'Head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. It is important to note that Head teachers 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 complete an application for Leave of Absence, in advance, and before making any travel arrangements. This can be collected from the school's main reception.

If term time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised and if the number of sessions absent hits the thresholds set down by Dorset CC of 10 ½ day sessions or 5 full days, parents/carers may be issued with a penalty notice or other legal action in accordance with the code (see section 6 for details).

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

Section 5: Understanding types of absence - Authorised & Unauthorised:

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 absences:

- **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 of absence from school after a parent's request. This includes:
 - Parents/carers giving their children permission to be off school unnecessarily such as for shopping, birthdays, to look after siblings;
 - truancy before or during the school day;
 - 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. An example of this would be where a parent states a child is unwell but on return to school there is evidence they have been on holiday.

Section 6: Legal Action

Penalty Notices for Non Attendance and other Legal Measures:

In education law, parents/carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular attendance of their child of compulsory school age at the school at which the child is registered, unless the absence has been authorised by the school.

Legal Measures for tackling persistent absence or lateness:

Dorset Schools and Dorset County Council will use the full range of legal measures to secure good attendance when all other support has been exhausted. Legal measures will be considered through a referral to Dorset's School Attendance Team.

Procedure for issuing Penalty Notices:

A Penalty Notice may be issued providing it does not conflict with other intervention strategies in place or other enforcement sanctions already being processed. Children's Services will respond to all requests within 10 school days of receipt and where all criteria are met, will:

In cases of unauthorised absence

- Issue a formal warning to the parent/carer of the possibility of a Penalty Notice being used.
- In the same letter set a period of 15 school days within which the pupil must have no unauthorised absence.
- Issue a Penalty Notice through the post at the end of the 15 day period if the required level of improvement has not been achieved.

Unauthorised Leave during Term time

In accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, as amended, a Penalty Notice can be issued in certain circumstances, for example where a parent takes a child on holiday during term time without the school authorising the absence. In such circumstances, although a minimum of 10 half day sessions of unauthorised absence will still apply before a Penalty Notice may be issued; the authorised person may issue a Penalty Notice without first issuing a formal warning to the parent as would otherwise be required. However s/he should still be satisfied that the parent was informed beforehand that, in some circumstances e.g. term time holiday, unauthorised absence could lead to a Penalty Notice being issued without further warning.

Who can receive a Penalty Notice?

Any Penalty Notice issued must be addressed to one parent but a Penalty Notice may be issued to each parent liable for the offence or offences.

An authorised person has discretion when deciding whether to issue one or more parents of a child with a Penalty Notice. This is to enable account to be taken of the specific circumstances in individual cases.

Each penalty notice carries a fine of £60 per parent per child if paid within 21 days of the penalty notice being posted. If the fine is not paid within 21 days the Penalty is automatically increased to £120 if paid within 28 days. If the fine remains unpaid then Dorset County Council will consider prosecution for the non- attendance. Payment methods are detailed on the Penalty Notices themselves.

Section 7: Other reasons for non-attendance at school:

7.1 Pupils reluctant to attend school:

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance should be discussed in partnership between the school, the parents/carers and the child. Parents and carers should contact the child's Head of Year immediately and openly discuss any worries or difficulties with school work, bullying, friendship problems, family difficulties, anything at all that affects attendance – and the school will involve other professionals as needed.

Making sure children have enough sleep and get up in plenty of time each morning aids good punctuality and attendance, as does ensuring that he/she leaves home in the correct clothes and is properly equipped, and that the homework diary is used for communication between home and school. The school will reinforce this with parents, carers and pupils.

7.2 Leavers:

If a child is leaving the school, parents/carers are asked to give the Head of Year comprehensive information about their plans including any date of a move and new

address and telephone numbers, the child's new education provider and the start date when known. This should be submitted to our school in writing.

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

7.3 Absence through competing at regional, county or national level for sport:

Parents and carers of able sportsmen and women can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in regional, county, national and international events and competitions. It is however, down to the Head of Year/ Head teacher's discretion whether to authorise this and they will wish to discuss 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 Head of Year/ Head teacher 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.

7.4 Teenage Pregnancy:

Support will be directed by the Designated Safeguarding Lead and assigned key worker to keeping a pupil in school during pregnancy and wherever possible expediting her return to full time education as soon as possible after the birth. A pupil who becomes pregnant should be allowed no more than 18 weeks authorised absence to cover the time immediately before and after the birth of the child. After that time, any absence should be treated as unauthorised.

Section 8: Record Keeping

School registers are legal documents. We will ensure compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for at least 3 years. Computer registers will be preserved as electronic back-ups.