



## **Attendance Policy**

**Last Reviewed:** September 2023

**Next Review Due:** September 2024

## Introduction

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. Birkenhead South Cluster of Primary Schools fully recognise their responsibilities to ensure pupils are in school and on time, therefore having access to learning for the maximum number of days and hours. It is also your responsibility as a parent / carer to ensure that your child attends regularly and on-time and this policy sets-out how we will work together to achieve this.

School attendance is given a high profile throughout all schools in the cluster because we know how important it is. It is discussed at school assemblies, parents' evenings, staff meetings and governors' meetings. It is also included in all school reports and newsletters. We also provide visual displays highlighting the importance of good attendance and punctuality in prominent positions throughout the schools.

**Every day the school is open school requires children to attend.**

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is your legal responsibility and permitting absence from school without a good reason creates an offence in law and may result in prosecution. Our policy applies to all children registered at schools in Birkenhead South Cluster and this policy is made available to all parents/carers of pupils who are registered at the schools on the individual school's website.

This policy has been written to adhere to the relevant Children Acts (2004), Education Acts (1996), Regulations and Guidance from the Department for Education(2019) in addition to guidance from the Local Authority.

Although parents and carers have the legal responsibility for ensuring their child's good attendance, the Headteachers and Governors at our schools 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.

**Research shows that missing school for just a few days a year can damage a pupils' chances of gaining good GCSE's (DfE 2016)**

## **Expectations to ensure delivery of this policy across Birkenhead South Cluster Schools:**

### **Parents/Carers:**

Parents/Carers have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child attends school regularly, and is in school for every lesson after they have registered. Parents/carers may be prosecuted if a child does not attend school regularly and punctually.

- To ensure children attend school every day unless they are too unwell;
- To trust that school staff will contact parents/carers during the school day if a child is too unwell to be in school;
- To inform school, by phone or in person, if a child is unable to attend on the first day of absence;
- To make all medical appointments outside school hours whenever possible;
- To ensure that their child arrives at school on time (8.45am – 8.55am). A reason should be offered for any lateness;
- To ensure that their child is collected on time at the end of the school day;
- To work closely with the school and attendance officers to resolve any problems that may impede a child's attendance;
- To take family holidays during school holiday periods and be aware that requests for holidays during term time will only be approved in exceptional circumstances;
- To be aware of curriculum requirements and be especially vigilant with regards to attendance during important academic times such as SATS.
- To provide evidence, if requested, if there are repeat absences for medical reasons.
- 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 on the first morning of absence.
- 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.
- The Education Act [1996] Section 444 requires parents to ensure that their children receive full-time education which suits their needs. Parents who fail in this duty may be prosecuted via the courts and fined up to £2 500 or, in some cases, imprisoned. The AntiSocial Behaviour Act [2003] Section 23 also indicates parents may be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice if their child's absence from school is unauthorised. Fixed Penalty Notices are for £60 if paid within 21 days and £120 if paid within 28 days.

### **Absence Procedures:**

If a child is absent parents/carers must contact the school as soon as possible on the first day of absence, by telephoning the school office (0151 608 2958 ) or calling-in in person.

If your child's poor attendance record continues you will be asked to meet with the Headteacher or Attendance Team to resolve the problem, but you can approach us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to school.

Parents/carers should contact the school by 9.30am on the first day of their child's absence. 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.

This information is used to determine whether the absence is recorded as authorised or unauthorised. The Headteacher in each school has the authority to determine whether absences are authorised or unauthorised.

In Birkenhead South Cluster, if we have not received reasons for a child's absence then we will contact parents/carers requesting these details. If we cannot make contact to confirm the reason, then the absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence (Attendance Code O). Unauthorised absences can result in a fixed penalty fine being issued by the Local Authority.

### **Medical Evidence:**

Birkenhead South Cluster schools may need more evidence, particularly if there are repeat absences for medical reasons.

We will accept the following as medical evidence:

- Doctor's certificate
- Appointment card- Date stamped
- Medication in the name of the child
- Prescription
- Text message from doctors or NHS confirming an appointment
- Care of the chemist –date stamped slip to show medical advice has been sought
- Appointment letters from hospital, doctor or dentist

This is not an exhaustive list.

In some cases, we may need to ask parents/carers about getting the School Nurse involved and/or a Doctor if there are particular concerns about health-related absences.

### **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

### **If a child is absent:**

- We will telephone parents/carers to advise that their child is not in school and we have not been given a reason why.
- We will telephone any other persons on the pupil's contact list if we are unable to make contact.

**Parents may receive a home welfare visit from either school staff or Merseyside Police in order to ensure the safety of you and your child.**

If because of medical and/or mental health needs, the absence is likely to continue for an extended period, a referral may be made to The Home Education Service which is a local authority service based on the Hilbre High School Humanities College site.

It provides temporary, continuing education for children who cannot attend their mainstream school, LA funded special school or alternative provision because of their medical and/or mental health needs. It is also available to those children with medical needs who are electively home educated (EHE).

Admissions: There is a dual referral process to access support from the Home Education Service; a medical referral which is supported by a school referral.

Medical referrals must come from a paediatrician, NHS specialist consultant, CAMHS psychiatrist or senior CAMHS therapist/psychologist. The medical referral is the trigger for pupils to be eligible for home education, school referrals alone cannot usually be considered.

### Stepped Interventions

The following interventions will be considered to support good attendance of 97% and above.

<b>97%-95%</b>	Early Warning	Early warning letters, phone calls home, monitored by class teachers
<b>95%-92%</b>	School Monitoring	Letters to targeted families, 1:1 meetings, home visits
<b>92% to 90%</b>	School Intervention (stage 1)	Attendance Report Card School letter to raise awareness of Fixed Penalty process, continued school support
<b>90% and below</b>	Attendance Service and School Intervention (stage 2)	Attendance Panel, Parenting Contract, Attendance Report Card, Meeting with Locality Attendance Officer and possible Fixed Penalty Warning or Notice which could lead to prosecution

**The electronic registration system provides many reports and information that assist the school to monitor attendance. These reports will be accessed when relevant and provide information to assist the school to strategically manage attendance issues. The LA will also have access to this information and will use the reports to support their role.**

### Lateness:

Poor punctuality is **not acceptable**. If your child misses the start of the day they can miss work and do not spend time with their class teacher getting vital information and news for the day. Late arriving pupils also disrupt lessons and this can be embarrassing and upsetting for the child. Lateness can also encourage absence as some pupils would rather not attend school at all than arrive late.

How we manage lateness:

- The school day starts at 8.55am and we expect your child to be in at that time.
- Registers are marked by 9.00am and your child will receive a late mark if they are not in by that time.
- At 9.30 am the registers will be closed – in accordance with the Regulations, if your
- child arrives after that time they will receive a mark that shows them to be present on site, but this will not count as a present mark in law and it will mean they have an unauthorised absence. This means that you may face the possibility of a Penalty Notice if the problem persists.
- Any late pupils should enter school through the main entrance. The administration staff will ask the parent/carer to sign their child in.
- If a child arrives unaccompanied by a parent/carer the staff will ask the pupil to offer a reason for lateness and this will be followed up by a phone call.
- If lateness becomes a regular occurrence parents/carers will receive a phone call to enquire about reasons and offer support as necessary.

### **What is expected of the pupils**

Pupils have a responsibility to themselves and others to play a positive role in the life of the school and to make the most of the educational opportunities available.

#### **Pupils are expected:**

- To do all they can to attend school regularly and punctually;
- To promptly arrive in class for both morning and afternoon register;
- To inform a trusted adult if there is a reason they are not happy to attend school;
- Older children to be aware of their attendance targets and work towards meeting them.

### **What is expected of the Birkenhead South Cluster Schools**

School attendance will be positively supported wherever possible and the promotion of good communication and co-operation between all parties involved will be paramount.

### **Each School in the Cluster is expected:**

- To create a school ethos that pupils want to be part of;
- To meet the legal requirements set out by Government;
- To give a high priority to punctuality and attendance;
- To develop procedures that enable the school to identify, follow up and record unauthorised absence and patterns of absence;
- To consistently record authorised and unauthorised absences on the register using the correct attendance code (see table Appendix 1);
- To develop a range of effective strategies to follow up intermittent and long term absenteeism and promote good attendance;
- To encourage open communication channels between home and school to improve attendance and punctuality
- To develop procedures for the reintegration of long term absentees;
- To seek advice from the Locality Attendance Officer (LAO) any child whose attendance causes concern and where parents/carers have not responded to school initiatives to improve.
- To develop procedures leading to a formal referral to the Local Authority;
- To adequately provide for pupils with difficulties, within the bounds of resources available.
- To give parents/carers data on attendance in a regular newsletter;
- To regularly update governors about school attendance and attendance concerns;
- To report each term (for example, at Parents Evening) on how your child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainment;
- To celebrate good attendance by displaying individual and class achievements; □ To reward good or improving attendance or punctuality.

### **Class teacher**

#### **Class teachers across Birkenhead South Cluster 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 Attendance Leader where there are concerns and acting upon them
- Providing background information to support referrals
- Monitoring follow-up once actions have been taken to correct attendance concerns



- Emphasising with their class the importance of good attendance and punctuality
- Following up uncleared absences with immediate requests for explanation which should be noted on SIMS register or reported directly to Attendance Leader □ Discussing pupil attendance at Parents' evenings

### **Roles of the Attendance Team in School**

*NB the Attendance team maybe the Headteacher or Senior leaders depending upon the size and structure of the school*

#### **Attendance Leader**

##### **The Attendance Leader is responsible for:**

- Overall monitoring of school attendance
- Trends in authorised and unauthorised absence
- Contacting families where concerns are raised about absence, including arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised
- Seek advice from the Attendance Service
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion with the Locality Attendance Officer (LAO)
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence
- Analysis of Attendance data to identify trends over time for whole school, year groups, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups
- Write Attendance Action Plan and review progress termly

#### **Attendance Officer**

##### **The Attendance Officer is responsible for:**

- Collating and recording registration and attendance information
- Taking and recording messages from parents regarding absence
- Reporting weekly attendance figures
- Making first response calls to parents of absent children where no contact has been made
- Recording details of children who arrive late
- Keeping an overview of whole school, 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 Inclusion Leader

- Sending out standard letters regarding attendance
- Arranging and attending Attendance Panels with the Locality Attendance officer (LAO) and keeping records

Other members of the school's team who are responsible for attendance are:

- **The Headteacher** [Mrs Lloyd], who decides on the classification of absences and puts the cases forward for prosecution or a Penalty Notice;
- **The School Governors**, with [Mrs Lindfield] in the active role as Attendance Link and is responsible for overseeing school attendance and agreeing policies and procedures;
- Mr Halewood, who is our **Attendance Support Officer** will work closely with the Inclusion Lead and Inclusion Officer to support families to improve attendance.

### **Celebrating good attendance**

Birkenhead South Cluster schools recognise and celebrate good and improved attendance. A range of strategies maybe used and some examples are listed below (further examples in Appendix 11):

- Fitness Friday;
- Attendance Report Card;
- Attendance display in every class room;
- Each class has a Pupil Attendance Officer who keeps the display up to date weekly;
- Attendance has a high profile in whole school assemblies each week;
- There are whole school Attendance displays which are updated regularly;
- Five for Five presentation each week in Assembly;
- Weekly and half-termly certificates to recognise pupils who have reached school target attendance of 97% or above;
- Letters are sent home to recognise and celebrate improved attendance (especially where a pupil has been in the category of "persistently absent", but has now achieved above 90% attendance);
- Food vouchers for Parents.

### **What is expected of the Local Authority**

The Local Authority has a responsibility to provide education and promote regular attendance of all statutory school age children.

The LA is expected:

To provide support to schools and parents/carers to fulfil their legal duty. The Attendance Service is the enforcement agency of the LA, as well as providing guidance and support through its officers; To use sanctions such as Penalty Notices or prosecutions in the Magistrates Court if the Parenting Contract is unsuccessful.

### **Types of absence**

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school, as either **AUTHORISED** or **UNAUTHORISED**. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required, preferably in writing.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for reasons such as illness, medical/dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other unavoidable cause.

Acceptable reasons for an authorised absence:

- The child is ill or is prevented from attending by unavoidable cause;
- The child lives over a certain distance from the school and either the LA has failed to make suitable arrangements to register the child at a nearer school or the LA has failed to make suitable transport arrangements;
- The child is absent on days exclusively set apart for religious observance in their particular faith;
- The child is absent 'with leave'. This refers to leave being granted by the school if authorised for exceptional circumstances.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no "leave" has been given. It is this type of absence which can lead to the Authority using sanctions and/or legal proceedings and includes:

- Parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily
- Truancy during the school day
- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Children who arrive at school too late to get a mark

- Shopping, looking after other children or birthdays
- Parents/carers own health issues
- Day trips and holidays in term time which have not been agreed.

Whilst any child may be off school because they are ill, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents and the child. If your child is reluctant to attend, it is never better to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and usually make things worse.

In the case of unauthorised absences, a fixed penalty may be issued. Head Teachers may submit a written request to the Attendance Service using the appropriate proforma asking for a Warning Letter and subsequently a Fixed Penalty Notice to be issued to parents/carers.

Persistent Absenteeism (PA) is when a pupil misses 10% or more (19 days) of their schooling across the full school year for whatever reason. Absence at this level is doing great harm and we need parent's/carer's and pupil's complete support to address this.

We will give priority to any pupil either at the PA level or at danger of reaching it and parents/carers will be informed of this immediately so that together we can put a plan in place to get that child back into school. All PA cases are also automatically made known to the Local Authority.

### **Holidays in Term Time**

In line with Local Authority and Government guidance, leave of absence in term time will only be considered in the most exceptional of circumstances. The principles for defining exceptional are: rare, significant, unavoidable and short, with unavoidable meaning an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time.

Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's education and parents are discouraged from withdrawing their child from school during term time and we ask all parents to consider that **that any savings you may make by taking a holiday in school time are offset by the cost to your child's education.**

**There is no automatic entitlement in law to a leave of absence in school time to go on holiday.**

All applications for leave of absence must be made in advance on the leave of absence request form which can be obtained from the school office or found in the appendices of this policy.

Any period of leave taken without the agreement of the school, or in excess of that agreed, will be classed as unauthorised and may attract sanctions such as a Penalty Notice.

### **Fixed Penalty Notices**

Penalty notices can be issued to each parent/carer for the following reasons:

(A) The child has had 10 or more sessions of absence in a period of no more than one term or two half terms and meets the terms of prosecution under Section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996 and the Local Authority has previously issued a warning letter giving the opportunity to improve attendance over a 15-day period.

(B) The child has 10 sessions of unauthorised leave of absence in term time and the Headteacher has advised the parent in writing that the leave of absence does not constitute the Headteachers view of an exceptional circumstance.

(C) The child has taken leave of absence in term time without parents requesting authorisation from the school.

(D) The child arrives late after the registers are closed (using code U) on 10 or more separate occasions in any one term

(E) An exclusion has taken place and the parent has allowed the child to be present in a public place during school hours, without reasonable justification, during the first five days of a fixed or permanent exclusion.

In b), c) and d) subsequent unauthorised absence may not be subject to a penalty notice as the parent will be made aware that to repeat this would be committing an offence and the Local Authority may prosecute for a repeat offence.

Fixed Penalty Notices will be issued by post. Payment of a Fixed Penalty Notice is £60 if paid within 21 days and £120 if paid after this time but within 28 days. Penalty Notices will be issued to each parent for each child. The exception to this would be where a parent has taken a child on unauthorised leave of absence without the consent of the other parent.

The Local Authority retains any revenue from the Fixed Penalty Notices to cover enforcement costs. Non-payment of a Fixed Penalty Notice will result in the withdrawal of the notice and may trigger a prosecution of parents/carers by the Education Social Welfare Service under Section 444 Education Act 1996. There is no right of appeal by parents/carers against a penalty notice.

### **Summary**

The Birkenhead South Cluster of schools have a legal duty to publish absence figures to parents and to promote attendance. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend. School staff are committed to working with parents as the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible.