



Heatherside Infant School – Attendance & Absence Policy

POLICY TYPE	REVIEWED BY	APPROVED	REVIEW CYCLE	NEXT REVIEW
Government Statutory Policy	FGB	23.4.20 & Updated Oct 2020	Annual	September 2021

At Heatherside Infant School we aim to work closely with parents* to achieve and maintain high standards of attendance. 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 children 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. Statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and absence below 95%.

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 our children to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered it is vital a child is 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.

**For the purpose of this policy, the term parents refers to parents, guardians and carers or anyone else with parental responsibility.*

In order to achieve this, the school will:

- Promote a welcoming and positive atmosphere in school, where children feel safe and that their presence is valued.

- Promote parents' support of this policy as a vital contribution towards their child's education. Our Home School Agreement contains details of how we work with parents and outlines our shared expectations and responsibilities.
- Promote positive attitudes towards high standards of attendance and punctuality, which pupils should retain throughout life.
- Ensure that attendance is maintained effectively, and absences and lateness are followed up promptly.
- Meet legal requirements, with particular reference to identifying unauthorised absence.
- Keep accurate registration documents identifying authorised/unauthorised absences and check registers regularly, to note unexplained absences and identify patterns of absence and lateness if they are occurring.
- Report to parents on their child's performance and progress, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainment.
- Raise parental awareness of the importance of attendance and punctuality through a variety of strategies.
- Involve other agencies e.g. Locality Team, Children's Services, Parent Support Advisor, Educational Psychologist etc when difficulties arise and further support is needed.
- Ensure all staff are aware of School policy and deal consistently with absence and punctuality.
- Ensure good liaison when a change of school occurs.

Lateness Procedure

- Classroom doors open at 8.45 and school starts at 8.55
- Pupils must be in class ready to start work at 8.55 having self-registered.
- Classroom doors close at 8.55 and children must then enter via the front reception.
- A child arriving after the register has closed will be marked late.
- If a child is late, an accompanying adult should sign them in with office staff at reception.
- A child arriving after 9.15 a.m. will be marked late after Registers Close (this will be recorded as unauthorised if no acceptable reason is given.)
- All lateness is recorded daily. This information will be required by the courts, should a prosecution for non-attendance or lateness be necessary

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 may be subject to legal action** (see section 6 for further detail).

Parents of pupils who have patterns of lateness will be contacted to discuss the importance of good time keeping and how this might be achieved. If lateness persists, parents 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 or the Hampshire County Council will be required to issue parents with a penalty notice in accordance with Hampshire's Code of Conduct for issuing penalty notices for non-attendance (See Appendix 1 of this policy for further detail).

Responsibilities of Parents and Carers

Ensuring your 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:

- Inform the school on the first day (before 9.00am) and subsequent days of absence.
- Discuss with the school any planned absences well in advance. If it is known in advance that a child is going to be late or need to be collected early (due to an appointment) the parent must send an email or make a phone call to the office the day before.
- Support the school with their child in aiming for 100% attendance each year.
- Avoid taking their child out of school for routine or non-urgent medical or dental appointments.
- Only request for leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance.

Absence Procedure

- If a child is absent and a message/prior notification has not been received by 9.30 am, office staff will telephone parents to find out why the pupil is absent.
- If the absence is known in advance, a written note is required.
- If a child has any unexplained absences a letter asking for an explanation of the absence may be sent to parents or a follow up call will be made. The attendance system used in school automatically records any unexplained absences as unauthorised absence.
- A list of children with less than 90% attendance is produced for the Headteacher at the end of each half term and a letter may be sent to parents informing them of their child's absence record and the school's expectations.

Online registers will be checked for regular attendance by the designated admin staff. Teaching staff should also be aware and report any concerns to the Headteacher. The register is a legal document and may be used as evidence in a Court of Law. Where there is doubt about the authenticity of absence attributed to illness, school and the Locality Team can refer the matter to a school doctor or GP.

We have a legal duty to report the absence of any pupils 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 your 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, the school will establish the reason for this level of absence and, if appropriate, will work with parents and seek advice from relevant support agencies to bring about improved levels of attendance.

Medical and Dental Appointments

- Routine appointments should be made outside school hours.
- If an appointment is made in school time an explanatory note should be sent to school on the date before the appointment.
- Parents (or authorised adult over 16 years) must check children out and back in at reception when attending appointments during the school day.

Leave of absence

Amendments to school attendance regulations were updated and enforced from September 2013: **(Pupil registration) (England) regulations state that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. It is important to note that Headteachers 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 wishing to apply for leave of absence need to fill in an application form available from the school office or via the website in advance and before making any travel arrangements.

For illustrative purposes, the following circumstances *may* be considered by the school to be exceptional:

- leave requested for the purposes of religious observance, which may include the celebration of a festival or attendance at a ceremony;
- leave requested when a family needs to spend time together in order to support each other during or after a crisis;
- leave requested by service personnel and other employees who are not permitted to take leave outside term-time;
- leave requested for one-off special occasions such as the wedding of a close family member or the graduation of an older brother or sister;
- leave requested for a student who has qualified to participate in an event or exam organised by a national body or receiving school.

The regulations stipulate that every request received must be considered on an individual basis. Even in the case of exceptional circumstances, the school must determine whether to approve the absence or not. In making this decision, primary consideration will be given to the child's attainment, attendance and ability to catch up on missed schooling, followed by the frequency of the request, the nature of the event for which leave is sought and whether the parent has given advance notice.

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 in Hampshire's

Code of Conduct parents will be issued with a fixed-penalty fine or other legal action in accordance the code as detailed in Appendix 1.

Absence for Year 1 and 2 pupils will not be authorised under any circumstances during End of Key Stage Assessment and National Phonic Screening weeks i.e Easter until end of June.

Absence during the first two weeks in September will not be authorised even in exceptional circumstances as this is an important settling in time for the children.

Copies of the relevant Department for Education (DfE) regulations are available on request. Further information is available at www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/advice/f00221879/advice-on-school-attendance.

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 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
 - 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. Any changes will be communicated to parents/carers. 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.

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

Hampshire Schools and Hampshire County Council will use the full range of legal measures to secure good attendance. Legal measures will only be considered through a referral to Hampshire's Attendance Legal Panels where:

1. **The child or family do not require the support from any agency to improve the attendance**
2. **The child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence and parents are complicit in the child's absence.**

The following legal measures are for pupils of compulsory school age who are registered at a school:

- Parenting contracts set at Education Planning Meetings
- Parenting orders
- Penalty notices
- Education Supervision Orders
- Prosecution

Legal Measures for absence taken when the headteacher has declined parent/carers request for leave of absence

Where a pupil has unauthorised absence due to either:

1. non-approval of a parent/carer's request for leave of absence or
2. a holiday that has been taken without permission and the unauthorised absence is for 10 or more sessions (5 days) in any 100 possible school sessions then a penalty notice for non-attendance will be issued

Where a child has **unauthorised absence**, the school must enforce Hampshire's Code of Conduct for issuing Penalty Notices or follow its guidance on other Legal Measures for Non-Attendance. The Code of Conduct is a statutory document that ensures that powers for legal sanctions are applied consistently and fairly across all schools and their families within the authority. A copy is available from <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/education/hias/learning-behaviour-attendance/attendance-guidance-for-parents/possible-penalties.htm>

Record preservation

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.

APPENDIX 1 – PENALTY NOTICES AND OTHER LEGAL MEASURES

The code of conduct states that:

Schools or Hampshire Local Authority will issue a Penalty Notice for any unauthorised absence where the pupil has been:

- absent for 10 or more half-day sessions (five school days) of unauthorised absence during any 100 possible school sessions – these do not need to be consecutive
- persistently late (coded *U*) for up to 10 sessions (five days) after the register has closed
- persistently late before the close of the register (coded *L*), but the school has met with parents and has clearly communicated that they will categorise as unauthorised any further lateness (code *O*), and where the threshold of 10 sessions (five days) has been met
- absent for any public examinations of which dates are published in advance
- absent for any formal school assessments, tests or examinations where the dates have been published in advance unless the issuing of a Penalty Notice would conflict with other intervention strategies in place or other sanctions already being processed.

If a child's has unauthorised absence meets any of the above criteria and the family or child do not require any agency support to improve the attendance, then a single Penalty Notice is issued for either:

1. **10 sessions of unauthorised absence or lateness in any 10-week school period**
2. **1 or more sessions of unauthorised absence during a public exam, formal school assessment or testing where dates are published in advance.**

Parents and Carers will be warned of the likelihood of a penalty notice being issued for unauthorised absence either via a letter, through the leave of absence request form, or through the school's attendance policy and website. The penalty notice is a fine that is issued to each parent/carer who condoned (or was responsible for the child) during the period of unauthorised absence for which the fine has been issued. For each case of unauthorised absence, the school or Hampshire County Council will decide whether a Penalty Notice is issued **to one or more parent/carers** for each child. **N.B** This could mean four penalty notices for a family with two siblings both with unauthorised absence for holiday i.e. one Penalty Notice for each child to each parent.

Each penalty notice carries a fine of £60 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 the Hampshire County Council will consider prosecution for the non-attendance. Payment methods are detailed on the Penalty Notices themselves. Penalties are to be paid to Hampshire County Council and revenue resulting from payment of Penalties is used by the County Council to help cover the costs of issuing Penalty Notices and/or the cost of prosecuting recipients who do not pay.

For further information parents/carers can request a leaflet from their school and should visit Hampshire County Councils website at: <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/education/hias/learning-behaviour-attendance/attendance-guidance-for-parents/possible-penalties.htm>

APPENDIX 2 - COVID 19 PANDEMIC

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools#attendance>

Attendance expectations

The DFE guidance above states:

In March, when the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was increasing, we made clear no parent would be penalised or sanctioned for their child's non-attendance at school.

Now the circumstances have changed, it is vital for all children to return to school to minimise, as far as possible, the longer-term impact of the pandemic on children's education, wellbeing and wider development.

Missing out on more time in the classroom risks pupils falling further behind. Those with higher overall absence tend to achieve less well in both primary and secondary school. School attendance will therefore be mandatory again from the beginning of the autumn term. This means from that point, the usual rules on school attendance will apply, including:

- parents' duty to ensure that their child attends regularly at school where the child is a registered pupil at school and they are of compulsory school age
- schools' responsibilities to record attendance and follow up absence
- the availability to issue sanctions, including fixed penalty notices in line with local authorities' codes of conduct

Barriers to Attendance

- Anyone who has been in direct contact with a person with a positive Covid diagnosis should self-isolate for period designated by PHE or DFE
- No one with Covid symptoms should attend a setting for any reason and should seek advice from the NHS Health Checker 111.NHS.uk

Coding Registers

In Hampshire the following SIMS attendance codes will be used for recording Covid-related absence:

- 7 *Illness due to Covid-19*
- 8 *Self-isolating due to Covid-19*
- 9 *Shielding due to Covid-19*

Accountability for absence

As stated in the main policy above Hampshire Schools and Hampshire County Council will use the full range of legal measures to secure good attendance.

The school will seek advice from Hampshire Legal Intervention Team on any sustained absence caused by Covid.