



# ST. PETER'S CE PRIMARY SCHOOL & NURSERY EDGMOND

## Attendance Policy

At St. Peter's CE Primary School & Nursery, we work hard to ensure that we provide a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all children want to be and are keen and ready to learn. We recognise that some pupils find it harder than others to attend school and therefore at all stages of improving attendance, we work in partnership with children and families to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place.

### **Why is school attendance important?**

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school. Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an exceptional absence in advance from the school.

High levels of attendance are essential for children to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances. Statistics show that the pupils with the highest attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 have higher rates of attendance over the key stage compared to those with the lowest attainment.

### **How do we promote the benefits of good attendance at St. Peter's?**

At St. Peter's we set high expectations of attendance for every child and communicate these expectations clearly and consistently to children and parents. We regularly analyse our data to identify patterns in order to target our improvement efforts, and work closely alongside Telford & Wrekin local authority and our local Education Welfare Officer (EWO) to overcome barriers to attendance. We understand that attendance cannot be seen in isolation and believe that the foundation to good attendance is a calm, orderly, safe and supportive environment in which all pupils want to attend and can thrive, achieve and build positive relationships.

We aim to:

- Develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance.
- Have a clear school attendance policy which all staff, pupils and parents understand.
- Accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow up absence.
- Regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place.
- Build strong relationships with families, listen to and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them.
- Share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities, and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe.

### **Our whole school culture**

We believe that good attendance at school is vital and, alongside good behaviour, make this a central part of our vision, values, ethos, and day to day life. We regularly communicate our high expectations of attendance to families through newsletters, email correspondence and face-to-face conversations in order to help parents and carers understand what is expected of them and why good attendance is so important to their child's attainment, wellbeing,



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Galatians 5:22-23

and wider development. In assemblies, we demonstrate to children the benefits of good attendance throughout their school life. We praise and reward improvements and achievements in attendance at whole school, key stage, class or individual level. This is always done sensitively according to context and children's wishes.

### Roles and responsibilities

Our Headteacher, Claire Medhurst, has overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance in school. As part of this role she offers a clear vision for attendance improvement, evaluates and monitors expectations and processes, oversees and carries out data analysis, and communicates messages regarding attendance to children and parents.

At the beginning of every school year, whole school targets are set for both improving attendance and reducing persistent absence in conjunction with our Education Welfare Officer and governing body as part of a continuous cycle of improvement and review. Attendance is formally reviewed on a half-termly basis with any concerns raised and/or actions taken recorded electronically. This system then enables us to track particular pupils or groups of children weekly should their attendance be causing concern. Attendance data is also reported to governors each term. The messages, processes, and strategies we use to promote good attendance throughout the school year are regularly reviewed and updated in order to allow us to monitor and improve attendance and reduce absence. Alongside the Headteacher, all our teaching and non-teaching staff know the importance of good attendance, are consistent in their communication with children and families and receive the training and professional development they need.

In conjunction with other schools in the Newport cluster, we employ an Education Welfare Officer and a Family Support Worker. These staff work closely with our families, conduct home visits when necessary and work in partnership with both our school leadership team and the local authority's School Attendance Support Team. All staff working in school are regularly trained to recognise that children missing education can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, sexual abuse and child sexual and criminal exploitation. Staff know that they must pass on any concerns regarding attendance to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as possible.

### Expectations

Our school and nursery day begins at 8.45am. The school doors open at 8.35am and children can be dropped off and come into school and into class from this time, to enable a prompt start to sessions. For reasons of safety, children should not arrive, or be left unaccompanied on the school site, before this time. **Attendance registers are taken at 8:45am and 1pm promptly in every class.** Children arriving at school after this time will be marked as late. We offer a flexible, cost-effective drop-in Breakfast Club provision to all children from Nursery to Year 6 which runs daily from 7.30am onwards.

The school day ends at 3.15pm and the afternoon nursery session at 3:30pm. Each teacher dismisses their class to parents/carers from the main school gates at the end of the day. If parents are going to be late or there are any alterations to the usual collection arrangements, we ask that they contact school as soon as they are able to let us know what arrangements have been made. Any children who have not been collected will be cared for in After-School Club until a parent/carers or other authorised adult arrives.

Parents/carers can access attendance records for their child at any time by using the ScholarPack app which they are provided details of on admission to school.

### Reporting absence

If a child is too unwell to attend school, a telephone call to the school office before 9.15am is required. Parents/carers are expected to provide details of symptoms when keeping children off school due to illness and make contact with school on a daily basis to inform us of their progress. If a child is absent from school and we have not received a phone call or message explaining why by 9:15am, we will always make every effort to contact parents/carers in order to ascertain the whereabouts of their child.



### **Absence requests**

Should a child need to be absent from school for any other reason, for example a medical or dental appointment, evidence must be provided (for example a letter/appointment card/email/text message) and an absence request form completed and returned to school in advance. These forms are available from the school office or can be downloaded from the school website. Only exceptional circumstances warrant a leave of absence. Please be aware that holidays during school term time will not be authorised and may be subject to a Fixed Penalty Notice. For more information regarding fines, please see the guidance notes for parents at the end of this policy.

### **What happens when absence becomes a concern?**

If a child is absent, no message has been received and we have not been able to make contact with parents/carers, we will ask our Education Welfare Officer to conduct a home visit in order to carry out a safety and wellbeing check. Should an unexplained absence continue for three days or more, we will consider a referral to the local authority Attendance Support Team and/or Family Connect. After ten consecutive days of absence, school staff will initiate the Child Not Receiving Education/Child Missing from Education protocol as advised by Telford and Wrekin Council. If a parent/carer expresses their intention to remove their child from school with a view to electively home educating, a meeting will be held with parents/carers and a representative from the local authority before a final decision is made.

### **Persistent absence**

The Headteacher tracks attendance on a weekly basis and makes contact with any families whose attendance is a concern. This may be through a face-to-face conversation, telephone call and/or letter. Every half term, during our attendance review, the parents/carers of any children whose attendance drops below 90% will also be contacted by our Education Welfare Officer unless there is a clear, authorised explanation as to why a child has been absent (for example, following an operation). In the first instance, this will be a telephone call during which our EWO will explain to parents why they are making contact and offer support. If a child's attendance has not improved by the date of the next attendance review, the family will receive a SAL1 letter formally recording that their child's attendance is a cause for concern and again offering support. Should attendance remain a concern, the family will receive a SAL2 letter which explains that any illnesses or medical conditions reported, for which evidence is not provided with either an official medical appointment card, copy of any prescriptions issued or proof from a GP, will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. A referral will then be made to the local authority Attendance Support Team if attendance does not significantly improve.

### **Support**

Support with attendance is always on offer to families who need it. Should a parent/carer require support, they can make an appointment to speak to the Headteacher and/or the Education Welfare Officer or Family Support Worker by contacting the school office. We aim to apply this policy fairly and consistently but in doing so will always consider the individual needs of our children and their families who have specific barriers to attendance. We will also always be mindful of our obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We acknowledge that some children face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. These can include pupils who suffer from long term medical conditions or who have special educational needs and disabilities. Their right to an education is the same as any other child and therefore our attendance ambition for these children is the same as for any other child. However, when working with their parents to improve attendance, we will always be mindful of the barriers these pupils face and put additional support in place where necessary to help them access their full-time education.



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### Guidance Notes for Parents requesting Leave in Term Time

1. Parents wishing the school to consider granting leave in term time should read these notes carefully and then complete and send an absence request form to the Headteacher. This form should be sent to the school in time for the request to be considered **before** the desired period of absence. (Parents are strongly advised not to finalise any planned absence before receiving the school's decision regarding their request). In any event the request form must be received by the school at least four weeks before the leave in term time requested dates to allow sufficient time for appropriate consideration.
2. The granting of leave of absence in term time is, by law, a matter for consideration and decision by the Headteacher. There is no automatic right to any leave in term time. The Department for Education (DfE) Guidance '*Working Together to Improve School Attendance (Feb 2024)*' states that: *Generally, the DfE does not consider the need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance.* Telford & Wrekin Local Authority (LA) policy supports that view. Where such requests are made, the Headteacher should decide if there are **exceptional circumstances** before the leave is granted, if the leave is granted the Headteacher has the discretion to agree the duration of that leave.
3. Each case will be considered individually and on its own merits. Parents therefore, need to consider very carefully before making any request for leave in term time, the demands of the National and wider School Curriculum especially at the Key Stage assessment stage. In considering a request, the school may also take account of: -
  - the **exceptional** circumstances stated that have given rise to the request;
  - whether the child is compulsory school age;
  - the stage of the child's education and progress and the effects of the requested absence on both elements;
  - whether the same trip could be taken during the 13 weeks school is closed to pupils?
  - students/pupils on examination courses or due to take SATS will **not** normally be granted leave of absence.
4. Where parents have children in more than one school, a separate request must be made to each school. The Headteacher of each school will make their own decision based on the factors relating to the child at their school. However, there is an expectation that all schools involved will communicate and all agree a decision whether to authorise or not. It is hoped that if this situation arises parents will be persuaded to accept the reasons for refusal given and, thereby, withdraw any leave requests.
5. Where requests for a grant of leave in term time are received from only one parent the response letter – agreeing or refusing – will be either addressed to both/all parents where they live at the same address or to each where they do not. This is to ensure, particularly in the case of a refusal, that both or all parents are fully aware of the consequences of ignoring a refusal as the refusal letter clearly states that each parent may receive a penalty notice.
6. Should the school decide to grant the leave. but the child **does not return to school at the time s/he was expected to** (i.e. following the expiry of the granted leave in term time period) and, no information is available to the school to explain/justify the continuing absence or, make known the whereabouts of the child, **his/her place at the school could be lost.**
7. Should the School decide **not to grant the leave** and parents still take their child out of school the absence will be recorded as **unauthorised** which may be subject to a Penalty Notice fine of £160 per parent per child. This Penalty Notice fine will be reduced to £80 if paid within the first 21 days. Failure to pay the £160 fine within the period 22 to 28 days may lead to Court proceedings, which could ultimately result in a fine of up to £2500 and/or imprisonment of up to three months.



### National Framework for Penalty Notices

In August 2024 the Government introduced a new National Framework for Penalty Notices (for schools in Telford & Wrekin the changes apply from 1st September 2024).

Parents and carers need to be aware of the following changes:

- If your child has 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a 10 school week rolling period, you may be issued with a Penalty Notice. These 10 sessions may include any unauthorised absence, including leave in term time, and do not have to be consecutive.
- Penalty Notices have increased to £160 from September 2024. This can be reduced to £80 but only for the first Penalty Notice issued, if paid within 21 days – this reduction does not apply to any subsequent Penalty Notice.
- Any second Penalty Notice, to the same parent for the same child, issued within three years of the date of the first Penalty Notice will be charged at a flat rate of £160.
- A third Penalty Notice will not be issued within a three-year rolling period to the same parent for the unauthorised absence of the same child; alternative action or legal measures will be utilised for subsequent offences.
- In some circumstances a ‘Notice to Improve’ may be issued. However, a Notice to Improve will only be used in cases where support is appropriate. They will not be issued in cases of unauthorised leave in term time for holidays, where information for parents is included on schools websites.

In developing and publishing the new national framework, the Government has renewed appeals to parents not to take their children out of school during term time. The Governors and Headteacher of this school support this and students will only be given permission to take leave in term time if there are exceptional circumstances. The DfE guidance **Working Together to Improve School Attendance** (February 2024) states that Generally, the DfE does not consider the need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance. (Paragraph 38).

Each application for leave in term time will be considered and if it is agreed and authorised the Headteacher will determine the duration of any leave. However, if the application is not agreed and the absence occurs the dates will be unauthorised. Parents will be notified of any decision in writing. This notification may be hand delivered directly to the parent, emailed or posted to the parents’ home address.

As a school we are asked to inform you that in line with Telford and Wrekin Council Policy, if your child is absent for 10 school sessions within a 10 week rolling period and that absence is unauthorised, you may be subject to a Penalty Notice fine as detailed above.