

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Blewbury C.E. Primary School

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Attendance Policy

Blewbury C.E. Primary School is committed to providing the best possible education for all our pupils and embraces the concept of equal opportunities for all. We strive to provide an inclusive environment where all pupils feel valued, can learn about themselves and the world, and can learn and grow together.

For a child to reach their full potential, a high level of school attendance is essential. We will consistently work towards a goal of 100% attendance for all pupils. Every opportunity will be used to convey to pupils and their parents the importance of regular and punctual attendance including, for example, through newsletters and end-of-term reports. Attendance of all pupils, especially those where levels of absence are causing concern, is analysed regularly, as is attendance at a class, group (for example, children in receipt of Pupil Premium funding compared to those who are not) and school level. Systems used to improve attendance are reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that we are meeting our set targets.

School attendance is subject to various Education laws and this school attendance policy is written to reflect these laws and the guidance produced by the Department for Education. This policy outlines the procedures the school will use to ensure it meets its attendance targets.

Why regular attendance is important

Any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning. Any pupil's absence disrupts teaching routines so may affect the learning of others in the same class.

Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure regular attendance; permitting absence from school without a good reason creates an offence in law and may result in prosecution.

1. Promoting regular attendance

Helping to create a pattern of regular attendance is everyone's responsibility – parents, pupils and all members of school staff.

The school uses all opportunities to remind parents of their responsibility to ensure their children receive full-time education. This is done through regular reminders in the newsletters, discussions with parents when children start Foundation Stage, and through ongoing discussions with parents of children where attendance is a cause for concern.

We have an individualised approach to working with families to improve attendance and the importance of regular attendance is highlighted in newsletters and assemblies.

2. Understanding types of absence

Every half-day absence from school must be classified by the school (not by the parents), as either **authorised** or **unauthorised**. Therefore, information about the cause of any absence is always required. This includes any COVID related absence. This is coded according to the DfE guidelines.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a reason like illness, medical/dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies, or other unavoidable causes. If this occurs, school may ask for evidence of the appointment to be able to authorise the absence.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' is therefore granted. This type of absence can lead to the Local Authority County Attendance Team using sanctions and/or legal proceedings. Absence which might fall into this category includes:

- Parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily;
- Truancy before or 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;
- Day trips and holidays in term time;
- Excessive illness without medical evidence.

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, never 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.

You can support your child by:

- Ensuring regular and early bed times;
- Helping with homework;
- Having uniform and equipment prepared the night before;
- Providing a healthy breakfast;
- Reporting any academic or social concerns promptly;
- Retaining open & honest communication with your child's school;
- Being positive about school (even if your own experience was less than positive);
- Encouraging your child to invite friends home to support friendships in school

3. Persistent absenteeism (PA)

A pupil becomes a 'persistent absentee' when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year for any reason. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to any child's educational prospects and we need the fullest support and co-operation of parents to tackle this.

All absence is monitored thoroughly. Any case that is seen to have reached the PA threshold or is at risk of moving towards that threshold is given priority and parents will be informed of this immediately.

In cases where a pupil begins to develop a pattern of absences, or where attendance over time is lower than 90%, the school will try to resolve the problem by contacting parents. Initially this will be done through an informal discussion, either face-to-face or by phone, which will be followed up by a letter to the parent from the headteacher to document the conversation. The headteacher will liaise with the County Attendance Team to ensure necessary action is taken when incidents of poor attendance and / or punctuality are identified.

If attendance continues to be a problem despite these actions, the headteacher will invite parents in to school to discuss the causes of the problem and possible ways forward. At this point, a parenting contract will be agreed in consultation with parents. The Early Intervention Service may be involved at this point through the attendance of a Hub worker at this meeting. The headteacher will also consider the potential for involvement of other specific agencies and the possible need to complete an Early Help Assessment and begin Team Around the Family processes.

4. School procedures

Any child who is absent from school at the morning or afternoon registration period must have their absence recorded. If there is no known reason for the absence at registration, it is recorded as unknown (N) in the first instance. When further information is obtained, for example, from the school answer machine or through first-day absence phone-calling, the code will be amended to reflect the reason for the absence. Where absence is not due to illness or for medical reasons, the office staff in discussion with the Headteacher will determine whether the absence is authorised or not, and, again, the code will be amended to reflect this (U for unauthorised absence).

Telephone numbers

There are times when school needs to contact parents about many issues, including absence, so it is important to ensure current contact details are always held by school. To help us, we ask parents to ensure we always have an up-to-date number and email address. These are then checked throughout the year, but parents can help by being proactive in letting a member of staff in the office know of any changes.

4i. First day absence Parents are requested to inform the school on the first day of a child's absence. This can be done through a message on the school answer phone; through a written note or email sent to school; or verbally to a class teacher or member of the office staff. Messages from siblings are not accepted as reports of absence.

After the close of registers, any unexplained or unexpected absences are followed up by a phone call from a member of the office staff.

Information obtained from phone calls or from notes is transferred into the electronic register by the person making the phone call in the form of the DfE attendance code.

4ii. Third day absence Where a child is still absent and it has not been possible to make contact with parents, the School Secretary will continue to use all of the contact details held by school to get in touch with parents or other family members. This will continue throughout the first and second day of absence and will include contact by text via Parent Mail message where appropriate. Where contact has not been made by the third day, the Headteacher will be informed, and a standard letter will be sent by first class post asking parents to contact the school immediately.

4iii. Continuing absence Where contact is still not made after four days, the headteacher will speak to the Attendance and Engagement Officer for the school who is alison.sim@oxfordshire.gov.uk (or the Local Authority's Children Missing Education Administrator (currently Alan Blackmore, contact alan.blackmore@oxfordshire.gov.uk) and seek advice about next steps. Where no immediate action is suggested, the school's Missing Pupil Policy will apply from the tenth day of unexplained absence. In the meantime, attempts to make contact using all the details held by the school will continue daily.

5. Lateness

Poor punctuality is not acceptable. If a child misses the start of the day, they will miss work and miss information about the day. Late arrival is disruptive to teachers and other pupils and can encourage absence. Children often feel uncomfortable arriving late, so this should be avoided.

Morning registration will take place at the start of school at 8:55am. The registers will remain open for 20 minutes. Any pupil arriving after this time before the close of registration are marked as late and a note of the time is made. All late arrivals are noted in the late arrival register located in the office. Any cases where absence was for attending an early morning medical appointment, for example, the appropriate authorised absence code will be used. Afternoon registration will be held at 12.45pm for Foundation Stage and Key Stage One and 1:00 pm for Key Stage Two, with registers closing 5 minutes after these times.

When making medical appointments, every effort must be made to ensure appointments are outside school hours but we acknowledge that this is not always possible. Pupils must attend as much of the school day around the appointment as possible.

Punctuality is then monitored carefully, and any recurrence may lead to parents being invited to meet the headteacher to discuss the issue.

6. The County Attendance Team

Parents are expected to contact school at an early stage and to work with the staff in resolving any problems together. This is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be sorted out in this way, the school may refer the child to the County Attendance Team at the Local Authority. At the school's request, they may issue a Penalty Notice per parent/carer, per child (currently £60 rising to £120 if unpaid after 21 days. If unpaid after 28 days a summons to Court will be issued for each unpaid Penalty Notice for prosecutions in the Magistrates Court. This can result in a criminal record and a fine of up £2,500, a Community Order, Parenting Order or ultimately a custodial sentence). The legislation is the Education Act 1996 sec. 444(1) and 444(1A).

Parents that have previously been issued with Penalty Notices for their children's unauthorised absences may receive summonses to Court in the event of further unauthorised absences.

"If any child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, his/her parent is guilty of an offence."

Alternatively, parents or children may wish to contact the County Attendance Team themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. Their telephone number is 01865 323513, email: attendance@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

7. Leave of absence

Taking holidays in term time affects a child's schooling as much as any other absence; parents should not take children away on holiday in school time. Any savings parents think they may make by taking a holiday in school time are offset by the cost to a child's education.

There is no automatic entitlement in law to time off in school time to go on holiday.

- It is widely known that the link between a student's attendance and attainment is irrefutable;
- Early poor attendance habits follow through into secondary school, further education and employment;
- Graduates earn, on average, double that of young people that leave school with no qualifications;
- All schools in Oxfordshire are encouraged to adopt a policy of not authorising Exceptional Leave;
- The headteacher will meet personally with every family applying for Exceptional Leave to stress the importance of good school attendance habits and links between attendance & attainment;
- Reasons for Exceptional Leave will be logged on the pupil's record and shared as part of the transfer/transition process.

The County Attendance Team can issue Penalty Notices for any unauthorised Exceptional Leave. Penalty Notices can be issued to each parent/carer concerned. Please note that it will be per parent per child. Payment within 21 days of receipt of notice is £60 and £120 if paid after this period but within 28 days. If the Penalty Notice remains unpaid after 28 days parents will each receive a summons to Oxford Magistrates Court. If unauthorised leave is repeated the County Attendance Team may summons each parent to Court without a Penalty Notice being issued.

8. Record keeping

Notes received from parent explaining absence are summarised and entered into Integris, the school's Management Information System (MIS).

By law, attendance registers must be kept for at least 3 years. At Blewbury, registers are completed using Integris software, which are backed up and retained for the length of time required by law.