

Meersbrook Bank



Community Primary School

Attendance Policy

September 2024

Revision history

Date	Changes	Author(s)
Jan 2019		R Edwards
Sept 2024	New Policy based on updated National and Local Authority guidance.	G Harvey

Approval History

Date	Committee	Minute No.
Jan 2019	Governors	7.1
1/10/24	FGB	12.2

Review: This policy will be reviewed every 4 years

Date due for review:
Sept 2028

To be read in conjunction with:

- [Safeguarding documents incl. KCSIE](#)
- [SEND Policy](#)
- [Children Missing from Education Guidance](#)

Rationale

Meersbrook Bank Primary School is committed to promoting good attendance to ensure that all pupils are able to achieve their full potential both academically and socially.

Regular attendance and good punctuality are vital to the educational achievement and personal development of the child. Only pupils who attend regularly can fully benefit from the academic, personal and social opportunities which are offered to them within the aims and vision of Meersbrook Bank Primary School.

1. Aims

Good attendance enables children to:

- make better progress, both socially and academically.
- achieve their maximum potential
- find school routines, learning and friendships easier to cope with.
- find learning more enjoyable.

We are committed to encouraging every child to have good attendance and punctuality so they can fully access all our schools have to offer and to prepare them for the next stage in their education and life by:

- Promoting good attendance and punctuality
- Reducing absence, including persistent and severe absence
- Ensuring every pupil has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled.

Robust attendance systems also enable us to

- Monitor and track pupils' attendance and punctuality through effective systems
- Utilise this information to support the school and parents to improve attendance.
- To address poor attendance through clear, consistent and effective procedures
- Act early to address patterns of absence.
- Build strong relationships with families to ensure pupils have the support in place to attend school.

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the working together to improve school attendance from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. These documents are drawn from legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- The Education Act (Section 444 – 1996; Part 3 - 2002; Part 7 – 2006)
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (and later amendments)
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

3. Roles and responsibilities

We believe attendance is everyone's responsibility, and that everyone has a role to play.

3.1 School Staff

Simon Smith is our governor for attendance who promotes the importance of attendance, scrutinises data and ensures this policy is implemented.

Gemma Harvey is our attendance champion and member of the senior leadership team, who works closely with everyone in our school community responsible for attendance.

Denise DeMarco is our Attendance Officer and is responsible for contacting parents and carers of children who are absent from school without reason.

We work closely with Sheffield Local Authority to monitor attendance and to support regarding individual families. We hold regular targeted support meetings in order to achieve this.

3.2 Parents/carers

Where this policy refers to a parent/carer, it refers to the adult the school and/or local authority decides is most appropriate to work with.

Parents/carers are expected to:

- Make sure their child attends every day on time.
- Telephone the school to report their child's absence before 9am on the day of the absence, and each subsequent day of absence, and advise when they are expected to return.
- Provide the school with more than 1 emergency contact number for their child(ren).
- Ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day.
- Take holidays in school holiday time.
- Understand that Head teachers no longer have the option to authorise term time holidays unless exceptional circumstance can be applied
- Understand that exceptional circumstance refer to urgent, unavoidable and 'one-off' situations that are unique to the normal reasons for needing to take a holiday during term time.
- Talk to someone in school if they are worried about something that is affecting or could affect their child's attendance or punctuality.
- Adhere to any attendance contracts that they make with the school and/or local authority

3.3 Pupils

Pupils are expected to arrive at school, on time, every day, ready to learn.

4. Recording attendance

We will mark absence due to physical or mental illness as authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

Where the absence is longer than 3 days or there are doubts about the authenticity of the illness, the school will ask for medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised, and parent/carer will be notified of this.

5. Planned absence

Attending a medical appointment will be counted as authorised if the pupil's parent/carer notifies the school in advance of the appointment. Parents/carers should notify the school about appointments prior to the appointment.

However, we encourage parents/carers to make routine medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. (Note – Sheffield dentists have agreed to issue all school aged children with appointments outside of school hours.) Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary and may be expected to attend school before and/or after the appointment.

The pupil's parent/carer must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence.

6. Lateness and punctuality

The school gates open at 8.40am. Children should arrive no later than 8.50am when registers are taken. The register closes at 9am.

When a child arrives late to school, the school will:

- Welcome them to school.
- Check in with them to make sure they are okay.
- Check that they have had breakfast and provide something if needed.
- Separately check in with the parent/carer for the purposes stated above and to ascertain any reason for the late arrival.

Any child arriving after 8.50am should:

- enter via the main entrance to inform the office that they are present.
- Before the register has closed (9.00am) they will be marked as late, using the appropriate code (L).
- They will also be asked what school meal they would like to ensure they get one.
- After the register has closed pupils will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code (U), unless proof of a medical appointment is presented in which case they will be issued with a medical code (M)

Schools' response to ongoing punctuality issues

- We will speak to parents/ carers to find out what is causing regular late arrival.
- We will monitor punctuality for improvement.
- We may invite parents/ carers into school for a meeting.

7. Unexplained Absence.

Parents are asked to contact the school on the first day of their child's absence by telephone.

As a safeguarding precaution, telephone contact is made with parents of any pupils who are absent where school has not been provided with a reason for absence. This is made on the morning of the absence.

Absence will only be authorised when a reason has been provided by the parent or carer.

In cases where parents have been asked to provide medical evidence for absence, this should be taken to the office in order for the absence to be authorised.

Home contact will be made by the school if several days absences remain unauthorised or the school has any concerns. If this is unsuccessful then the case may be referred to the Local Authority, where 'Child Missing from Education' procedures may commence.

Where any pupil we expect to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence:

- Identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained – this will be no later than 5 school days after the session.

- Call the parent/carer on each day that the absence continues without explanation to ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary.
- Where no contact has been made and the pupil remains absent on the 3rd day, a home visit will be made. If there is still no contact the school may begin enquiries elsewhere including with the Police and Social Care.
- Where relevant, report the unexplained absence to the pupil's external agency support worker.
- Where appropriate, offer support to the pupil and/or their parents to improve attendance
- Identify whether the pupil needs support from wider partners, as quickly as possible, and make the necessary referrals.
- Where support is not appropriate, not successful, or not engaged with, liaise with the local authority to issue a notice to improve, penalty notice or other legal intervention as appropriate.

8. Persistent and Severe Absence

Where absence escalates and pupils miss 10% or more of school (equivalent to 1 day or more a fortnight across a full school year which equates to 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks), the school and local authority will work together to put additional targeted support in place to remove any barriers to attendance and re-engage these pupils.

In doing so, we will consider some of the reasons for absence and understand the importance of school as a place of safety and support for children who might be facing difficulties, rather than reaching immediately for punitive approaches.

This may be in the form of an attendance contract. This is a formal written agreement between a parent and either the school or local authority to address irregular attendance at school. This contract seeks to secure engagement with support where a voluntary early help plan has not worked or is not deemed appropriate. An attendance contract is not a punitive tool, it is intended to provide support and offer an alternative to prosecution.

If all avenues of support have been facilitated by the school, local authority, and other partners, and the appropriate educational support or placements have been provided but severe absence for unauthorised reasons continues, it is likely to constitute neglect.

9. Authorised Absence: Approval for term-time absence

The headteacher will allow pupils to be absent from the school site for certain educational activities, or to attend other schools or settings.

The headteacher will only grant a leave of absence to a pupil during term time if the request meets the specific circumstances set out in the 2024 school attendance regulations. These circumstances include:

- Taking part in a regulated performance, or regulated employment abroad
- A temporary, time-limited part-time timetable
- Exceptional circumstances

We define 'exceptional circumstances' as circumstances that are unexpected, unavoidable, outside of parents'/carers' control and a 'one-off'. A holiday is not typically considered exceptional circumstances, and the code to record authorised holiday no longer exists.

A leave of absence is granted at the headteacher's discretion, including the length of time the pupil is authorised to be absent for.

A leave of absence will not be granted for a pupil to take part in a protest activity during school hours.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant background context behind the request.

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and, where possible, two weeks before the absence.

A leave of absence request form, is available from the school office and on the school website.

The headteacher may require evidence to support any request for a leave of absence.

Other valid reasons for authorised absence include (but are not limited to):

- Illness and medical appointments
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parent(s) belong (s). If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parent's religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart
- Parent(s) travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh gypsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) and circus people, bargees
- (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school.
- If the pupil is currently suspended or excluded from school (and no alternative provision has been made)

Other reasons the school may allow a pupil to be absent from the school site, which may be authorized are:

- Attending an offsite approved educational activity, sporting activity, musical exam or visit or trip arranged by the school
- Attending another school at which the pupil is also registered (dual registration)
- Attending provision arranged by the local authority
- If there is any other unavoidable cause for the pupil not to attend school, such as disruption to travel caused by an emergency, a lack of access arrangements, or because the school premises are closed

10. Attendance Prosecution

If a child of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly at a school at which they are registered, or at a place where alternative provision is provided for them, their parents may be guilty of an offence and can be prosecuted by the local authority.

11. Penalty Notices

Penalty notices are issued to parents as an alternative to prosecution where they have failed to ensure that their child of compulsory school age regularly attends school.

Penalty notices are intended to prevent the need for court action and should only be used where it is deemed likely to change parental behaviour and support to secure regular attendance has been provided and has not worked or been engaged with, or would not have been appropriate in the circumstances of the offence (e.g. an unauthorised holiday in term time).

The school will liaise with the local authority about children who meet the criteria for this. Prior to this, the school will consider the individual case, including whether the national threshold for considering a penalty notice has been met.

The threshold is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks; This can be met with any combination of unauthorised absence. For example, 4 sessions of holiday taken in term time plus 6 sessions of arriving late after the register closes all within 10 school weeks. These sessions can be consecutive, e.g. 10 sessions of holiday in one week; or not e.g. 6 sessions of unauthorised absence taken in 1 week and 1 per week for the next 4 weeks. The period of 10 school weeks can also span different terms or school years, e.g. 2 sessions of unauthorised absence in the Summer Term and a further 8 within the Autumn Term.

The school will consider whether a penalty notice is the best available tool to improve attendance for that pupil or whether further support, a notice to improve or another legal intervention would be a more appropriate solution.

A penalty notice may also be issued where parents allow their child to be present in a public place during school hours without reasonable justification, during the first 5 days of a suspension or exclusion (where the school has notified the parents that the pupil must not be present in a public place on that day).

Each parent who is liable for the pupil's offence(s) can be issued with a penalty notice.

The school does not benefit financially from penalty notices. Payments are made directly to the local authority. If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice.

If issued with a first penalty notice, the parent must pay £80 within 21 days, or £160 within 28 days.

If a second penalty notice is issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil, the parent must pay £160 if paid within 28 days.

A third penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within 3 years of the date of the issue of the first penalty notice. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time within those 3 years, alternative action will be taken instead.

12. Notices to improve

If the national threshold has been met and support is appropriate, but parents do not engage with offers of support, in partnership with the local authority, the school may offer a notice to improve to give parents a final chance to engage with support.

Notices to improve will be issued in line with processes set out in the local code of conduct for Sheffield Local Authority. They will include:

- Details of the pupil's attendance record and of the offences
- The benefits of regular attendance and the duty of parents under section 7 of the Education Act 1996
- Details of the support provided so far
- Opportunities for further support, or to access previously provided support that was not engaged with
- A clear warning that a penalty notice may be issued if attendance doesn't improve within the improvement period, along with details of what sufficient improvement looks like, which will be decided on a case-by-case basis
- A clear timeframe of between 3 and 6 weeks for the improvement period
- The grounds on which a penalty notice may be issued before the end of the improvement period

13. Monitoring attendance

The school will monitor attendance and absence data (including punctuality) regularly across the school, at an individual pupil, year group and cohort level.

Specific pupil information will be shared with the DfE on request.

The school has granted the DfE access to its management information system (SIMS) so the data can be accessed regularly and securely.

Data will be collected each term and published at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics.

The school benchmarks its attendance data against local and national levels to identify areas of focus for improvement, and share this information with governors.

14. Analysing attendance.

The school will:

- Analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify pupils or cohorts that need additional support with their attendance and use this analysis to provide targeted support to these pupils and their families.
- Identify pupils whose absences or lateness may be a cause for concern, especially those who demonstrate patterns of persistent or severe absence
- Look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns.

15. Reporting Attendance to parents/carers

The school will regularly inform parents/carers about their child's attendance and absence levels by

- Discussing attendance at parents and carers evening
- Notifying parents if attendance falls below the school's targets, which is monitored termly.
- Including attendance on pupils' end of year report.
- Communicating patterns of absence to parents/ carers to provide them with the opportunity to talk to us about any underlying cause,

All forms of communication will aim to be supportive while raising parent/ carer awareness of the potential impact of absence and challenging high levels of unauthorised absence.