

Southbury Primary School



Attendance Policy

January 2019

Identified staff with responsibility for attendance:

- Attendance Lead – Sonja Whincup (Assistant Head)
- Attendance Officer – Nadine Johnson
- Education Welfare Officer – Philip Artemis

All staff, pupils and parents are aware of the **Attendance Policy** and the procedures associated with it. The policy is written on the school website and is available upon request.

All staff acknowledge their responsibility for attendance and promote a positive culture that absence is not acceptable, except in the case of genuine illness.

Context:

The vast majority of children at Southbury have English as an additional language and have close family living abroad. This impacts upon attendance in several ways:

- Overcoming the language barrier to communicate with parents.
- Parents who take their children abroad for extended periods to attend to family matters, despite being refused permission by the school.

An extremely high percentage of children live within walking distance of the school, but punctuality is an issue for some families. Discussion with these families often raises parenting issues about routines, diet, sleep etc.

Attendance Target 2018 – 19 - above 96%

Absences in Term Time

Headteachers have the discretion to grant leave, but they should only do so in exceptional circumstances. If a Headteacher grants a leave request, it will be for them to determine the length of time that the child can be away from school. This leave will never be granted for the purposes of a family holiday. We will always pursue a Fixed Penalty Notice for holidays taken in term time. Following Government legislation in September 2013, no requests for pupil absence will be authorised by the Headteacher except in circumstances deemed to be exceptional. Parents can and will be fined for taking their child on holiday or out of school in term time without consent from the school. Please be aware that a Penalty Notice can be issued to **each** parent who fails to ensure their children's regular attendance at school.

Our school's actions in this regard are guided by the law:

- Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 places upon parents a duty to ensure that their child receives efficient full-time education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

- Where a child is a registered pupil at a school and the parent fails to ensure that child's regular attendance at school the parent is liable to be prosecuted for a criminal offence under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.
- In cases where this duty is not being fulfilled Section 444B of the same Act empowers the Local Authority to issue a Fixed Penalty. Payment of a Penalty notice is £60 if paid within 21 days or £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days; per parent, per child.
- Parents may also be at risk of losing their child's registered school place if they take prolonged absences from school.

Exceptional circumstances include:

- When a family needs to spend time together because of an immediate family members bereavement, crisis or serious illness
- Funeral of immediate family member
- Religious observance
- Transport was not provided by the LA when it should have been
- Children of service personnel about to go on deployment (permission would be considered as long as the request is accompanied by a letter from the Commanding Officer)
- One day of absence could be authorised for a wedding of an immediate family member and the invitation has been provided as evidence
- One off sporting events/performing arts competitions, if the child is participating and is at county standard or above and a letter has been provided from the performing arts/sports regional governing body as evidence
- One day of absence could be authorised for an immediate family members graduation ceremony/passing out parade
- Medical appointments (parents/carers should be encouraged to arrange non-urgent medical appointments outside of school hours when possible. If the medical appointment is during the school day, evidence must be provided. Schools should not authorise a whole days absence for a medical appointment that occurs in the morning – the child would be expected to return to school in the afternoon, and vice versa.

Absence will not be authorised for reasons such as the following:

- To care for other family members
- Birthdays
- To interpret for other family members
- No school uniform/shoes
- Bullying
- Friendship problems
- Head lice
- Learning difficulties
- Family holiday
- Weddings abroad – regardless of whether it is for immediate family members
- Family Anniversaries
- Death of a pet
- Travel problems

- School refusal

(The immediate family is a defined group of relations, used in rules or laws to determine which members of a person's family are affected by those rules. It normally includes a person's parents, spouses, siblings and children. It can contain others connected by birth, adoption, marriage, civil partnership, or cohabitation, such as grandparents, grandchildren, siblings-in-law, half-siblings, adopted children and step-parents/step-children, and cohabiting partners)

Removing children from roll:

In the event of a child being absent from school for longer than has been authorised, the school will liaise immediately with the Education Welfare Service and take the necessary steps for the child to be removed from roll. Nationally imposed procedures are adhered to at all times.

Penalty Notice Scheme:

From September 2013, the Governing Body have agreed to adopt the national scheme of Penalty Notice fines, to be issued to parents of children who have unauthorised absence recorded on their attendance records.

The school approaches this system with some reluctance but where parents have failed to co-operate or provide the necessary medical evidence for their child's absence, a warning letter is first sent to each of the parents who have parental responsibility. Penalty Notices are issued according the necessary procedures and are handled by the Education Welfare Service.

Roles and Responsibilities – a joint effort and shared responsibility

Organised allocation of roles in school is at the discretion of the Headteacher. The key thing, however, is that everyone is clear about their own role and how they work with their colleagues, in the school and the local authority, to ensure pupils attend school.

Headteacher:

- Overall responsibility to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly
- To delegate to a senior member of staff (currently Ms Whincup, Assistant Headteacher) overall day to day responsibility for attendance
- Registers are completed correctly and kept for the required statutory period. Headteachers may be called upon to give evidence in court
- Ultimate responsibility for authorising absence, but may delegate this to Deputy Headteacher.
- Ensure all statutory requirements are met e.g. reporting to parents on attendance

- Ensure targets are set and data shared with the relevant agencies such as the local authority or the DfE
- Ensure Attendance Policy is regularly reviewed
- Authorise issue of Fixed Penalty Notice and support Education Welfare Service (EWS) with the prosecution
- Ensure accurate information is sent back to the Local Authority

Attendance Lead (Assistant Headteacher):

- Day to day management of absence
- Ensure appropriate systems are in place
- Lead training for staff on attendance monitoring and recording
- Ensure first day calling takes place
- Line manage Attendance Officer
- Make referrals to Education Welfare Service
- Liaise with Education Welfare Service / Class Teacher and other agencies
- Ensure school is represented in meetings with parents
- Aim to resolve issues around management and monitoring of attendance
- Report to Headteacher and/or Management Team on attendance issues
- Check / ensure accurate data is submitted and measured over the appropriate time scale and submitted on time
- Notify Education Welfare Service of the need for a Fixed Penalty Notice and provide support with prosecution
- Generate warning letters to parents
- Lead the Attendance Incentive Scheme

Attendance Officer:

- Discuss attendance issues with parents including strategies to improve attendance and punctuality
- Meet with other agencies as and when appropriate
- Support parents in obtaining advice and guidance and signpost them to appropriate agency
- Transfer data onto the electronic system
- Print out reports as and when required
- Ensure registers are completed correctly
- Log late arrivals each day
- First day calling of parents
- Send out warning letters
- Check and record medical evidence for absence in targeted cases.
- Liaise with class teacher / parents / Lead Attendance Officer / Education Welfare Service
- Receive/log letters from parents
- Liaise with Attendance Lead re Fixed Penalty Notices

Governors:

- Fulfil statutory responsibilities including setting and agreeing attendance targets as required in the target setting arrangements
- Appoint Lead Governor for attendance
- Make regular reports on attendance to Governing Body
- Hold the school to account for attendance by providing challenge at the governing body and ensuring there is accountability for attendance
- Approve the Attendance Policy

Education Welfare Service:

- Deal with referrals in accordance with agreed procedures
- Monitor and supervise parenting orders, as directed by the court.
- Fulfil duty for safeguarding children in line with statutory regulation
- Liaise with family, school and other agencies to ensure pupils attend school regularly
- Advise schools on strategies to improve pupil attendance and work with schools to implement strategies.
- Work with schools and safer schools officers to carry out truancy patrols.
- Support schools with early intervention in order to improve attendance
- Support attendance officers, through training and support, on the accurate use of attendance codes and running attendance reports
- Comment on the data sent to Research and Information from schools. Identify any issues / trends / inaccuracies and raise them with schools
- Provide advice and guidance on target setting

A Good Start to the Day

- **Clear signal of start of day** – A whistle is blown on the playground at 8.55am as a signal that the children should line up in their classes.
- **The Headteacher**, Deputy Headteacher, other senior staff and the Attendance Officer all patrol the playgrounds for ten minutes before school to monitor behaviour and to talk with parents informally, thereby creating a calm start to the day.
- **Parental responsibility** – if a child is too ill to attend school, parents are responsible for informing the school before 9.00am. If this does not happen, the attendance officer rings the parent. In the event of being unable to contact the parent, absence is logged as unauthorised and a letter is sent in the post requesting a reason for absence.
- **The attendance officer** logs late comers and talks to parents.
- **Register closure** - half an hour after registration at 9.25am.
- **Make being late difficult** –
 - The Swansea Road gates are locked after 5 - 10 minutes

- All late arrivals have to report to the office
- Parents are required to give a reason for lateness
- The school gives a clear signal lateness is not acceptable
- Children who arrive late are expected to read a book in the detention hall during morning break.

Working with Parents:

The Assistant Headteacher, Attendance Officer and EWO liaise closely to support parents as much as possible. This may include:

- Challenge parents calling in to report absence
- Promote expectation of attendance on time
- Follow up on missing letters or medical evidence (required for those identified children whose poor attendance has been a matter of concern).
- All staff promote expectation of good attendance
- Remind parents of school policy through newsletters – e.g. no holidays during term time
- This policy has been adapted in the form of a visual flow-chart which is displayed in the lobby area.
- Meet with targeted groups of parents to discuss specific issues (e.g. poor punctuality) and to share strategies for improvement.
- Induction sessions for parents of new pupils to promote attendance generally.
- Use printouts of attendance to send to parents on an annual basis and use in individual interviews (e.g. parents' evenings)

Reward Systems:

A variety of reward systems are used to promote good habits of attendance and punctuality amongst the pupils. We currently run two Attendance Incentive Schemes (one for KS1 and one for KS2) where weekly prizes for excellent attendance are given out.

Persistent Absence:

Under new government guidelines, children whose attendance is 90% or lower are now classed as Persistent Absentees – these are identified at regular meetings between the Attendance Lead and the EWO. Strategies are discussed and regular contact with parents is maintained. Where school interventions are shown not make an impact on the child's attendance referrals to the EWS are made.

Although a range of strategies and actions will be taken on an informal basis, a formal procedure is applied when an absence remains unexplained, or lateness or absence are persistent.

This is:

- On the first day of absence a “phone call” is made by the Welfare Assistant
- If absences persists, letters are sent from the school drawing attention to the child’s attendance/lateness
- Persistent absence will trigger a discussion, on an informal basis, with the child/parent and reminder about the importance of regular attendance and punctuality. Parents are invited to the school offering them the opportunity to meet with the Attendance Officer and The Assistant Headteacher in charge of attendance to discuss the pattern of attendance
- If the parents do not attend the meeting, the next stage is for an approach to be made by the EWS either by letter or through a visit
- Further formal approaches might then be made according to the Local Authority’s attendance policy