

Ashford CE Primary School



Attendance Policy

Updated Policy:

Signed: ___P Wells_____

Approved by FGB: 24 September 2020

Chair of Governors

Attendance Policy

Our School Vision

We are a caring Christian community where everyone adopts an “I can” attitude; everyone feels valued, safe and loved by God. We celebrate our God-given individuality, achievements and talents and we aspire, with God’s help, to become the best that we can be. We believe that each one of us has the ability to achieve our highest potential, living and learning in the fullness of God.

I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

Philippians 4v13

Regular and punctual attendance at school is key to the academic and social development that will improve the life chances of children and young people.

Parents and carers have a duty to ensure that their children attend school regularly and punctually in order to get the most benefit from the opportunities.

Why Regular Attendance is so important

Any absence affects the pattern of a child’s schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning. Children and young people who do not attend school regularly are at risk from a whole range of factors that may lead to poor outcomes in terms of their educational achievement, future employment, financial security and citizenship.

Ensuring your child’s regular attendance at school is your legal responsibility and if you permit absence from school without a good reason it is an offence in law and may result in prosecution.

Promoting Regular attendance

Creating a learning environment where all pupils can achieve is everyone’s responsibility. Establishing positive patterns of regular attendance is vital and everyone has a responsibility to help. This includes parents, children and all members of staff.

What we will do

- Keep you up to date with attendance levels in the school through the Governors’ newsletter.
- At parent meetings inform you regularly on your son’s/daughter’s attendance, punctuality and how this relates to their academic progress.
- Celebrate good attendance by displaying individual and class achievements.
- Reward good or improving attendance through class competitions, prize draws and other systems as appropriate.
- Organise outside agencies such as the Inclusion Officer to visit the school and talk to children and/or parents about the value of good attendance.

- We will keep you updated regularly about the school's progress to our target and how your child's attendance compares.

School targets, projects and initiatives

The school has targets set by government to improve attendance and your child has an important part to play in helping us to meet these targets and to aim higher in all aspects of their education. **The school target for attendance is currently 96% or better.** Our aim is to achieve better than this because we know that good attendance is the key to successful schooling.

Many children have 100% attendance; they never miss a day's school. This is wonderful but we do understand that, due to illness, it may not be possible for all children every year. However once this percentage begins to drop, it can equate to a substantial amount of time missed that may not be obvious at first glance. For example, 95% is the same as a day off once every four weeks, 90% is the same as a day every two weeks. Anything below 90% is considered persistent absenteeism (see below).

Governors check school attendance data regularly and liaise with the senior leaders about ways of monitoring and improving attendance. Through the school year we monitor absences and punctuality to show us where improvements need to be made. Information on any projects or initiatives that will focus on these areas will be provided in ACE Highlights and/or the school's website and we would ask for your full support.

The school has a legal duty to publish its absence figures to parents and to promote attendance. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend. All school staff are committed to working with parents and pupils as the best way to ensure as high level of attendance as possible. If your child's attendance drops we will contact you to discuss how your child's attendance compares to the average and what we might be able to do to help you to improve it.

Understanding Types of Absence and School Procedures

Every half-day absence from school has to be recorded and classified with a code by the school, as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. **Only the school** can make this decision and record it. This is why information about the cause of any absence **is always** required, preferably in writing.

AUTHORISED absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness, medical/ dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other unavoidable cause.

UNAUTHORISED absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which "leave" of absence has not been given. This type of absence can lead to the Local Authority using sanctions and /or legal proceedings. The school reserves the right to use penalty notices. Some examples of this include:

- Parents/carers keeping their child away from school unnecessarily
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Absences that have not been properly explained

- Late arrival after the close of registration (morning 9.15am or afternoon 15 minutes after the start of the afternoon session)
- Shopping trips, looking after other children or adults or birthdays
- Day trips and holidays in term time that have not been agreed

Illness

Whilst it is understood that any child can have an illness and be away from school for a given period, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are always best sorted out by the parents/carers contacting school immediately to discuss the issues.

If your child is reluctant to attend:

- Please do not cover up the absence
- Please do not give in to pressure to excuse them from attending

The situation may worsen, become a habit and the causes will be harder to find and resolve.

The school needs to give careful consideration to the authorisation of absence for some pupils.

Where a pupil has frequent absences (for example if their attendance falls below 90%) the school may decide to ask for evidence such as a medical certificate, appointment card, or a label from prescription medication.

Additionally the school may wish to refer to the school nursing service where there are health concerns or if there is a view that illness is being used as an excuse to cover other reasons for absence. The school may also wish to seek the advice of the family GP having first discussed the matter with parents/carers to seek their permission to do this.

Sickness and/or Diarrhoea

In order to prevent the spread of bugs in school we do request that if your child suffers a bout of sickness and/or diarrhoea or contracts a sickness bug that you keep them at home for 48 hours after the last episode of the illness. This will help to contain the spread of infection. If your child has been sick for other reasons you may wish to reduce this to 24 hours. If a child is sick whilst at school we will ring you in order to collect them.

Dental/Medical Appointments

Wherever possible, parents/carers should make every effort to avoid making medical or dental appointments during the school day. It is preferable to try and arrange these during holiday periods or at the beginning or end of the school day. An appointment at the beginning of the school day should not result in a whole day's absence from school.

Medical slips need to be collected from the school prior to the appointment. These then need to be stamped or signed by the medical practitioner and returned to school.

Persistent Absenteeism (PA)

A pupil becomes a 'persistent absentee' when they are absent from school for 10% or more sessions across the school year for whatever reason. The reasons can be both authorised and unauthorised.

There is substantial evidence that absence at this level will do considerable damage to any child's educational achievement and future prospects. We will need the full support and co-operation of all parents to tackle this.

- We will monitor all absence thoroughly.
- If your child's attendance has reached or is in danger of reaching the PA level we will inform you immediately and make the case a priority.
- Pupils who have reached the PA level will be tracked and monitored carefully through our pastoral system and we will combine this with academic mentoring where absence is seen to affect progress and attainment.
- PA pupils and their parents may be subject to an Action plan and the plan may include: the allocation of additional support through a mentor or Home School Link Worker, individual programmes and participation in group activities around raising attendance.
- All PA pupils will be made known to the Inclusion Officer.

Absence Procedures

If your child is absent you must:

- Contact us as soon as possible on the **first day** of absence. This will be recorded in the school pupil attendance diary. You should then follow this up with a call each day of absence.
- Send a note in on the **first day** your child returns with an explanation of the absence – you must do this even if you have already telephoned us. If you have difficulty in doing this please speak to a member of our office team who will assist you in doing this.

If your child is absent we will:

- Telephone you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you.

If a child's attendance falls below 95% we may:

- Send a letter home reminding parents/carers about the importance of regular attendance.
- If regular attendance continues to be an issue, a meeting will be held between home and school. This may be with the Deputy Headteacher, Class teacher and/or the school's attendance governor.

If a child's attendance falls below 90%:

Parents/carers will be required to attend a meeting held by the Co-Head of School. Depending on the outcome of this meeting one of the following may occur:

- Parents may be required to produce medical evidence as detailed above for any absence to be authorised on the grounds of illness.
- A referral may be made to the Inclusion Officer.

If you are having problems getting your child into school regularly please contact the school immediately. By working together we will hopefully be able to address the issue and avoid attendance problems in the future.

Lateness

Poor punctuality is not acceptable. If your child misses the start of every day they can miss work and the opportunity of hearing vital information / news and sharing class time with their friends.

Late arriving pupils also disrupt lessons. Your child may also be embarrassed by arriving late and may fall into absenteeism in order to avoid the ordeal.

What we will do: (see separate communication from school for timings of the day during our re-opening during the COVID-19 pandemic)

- In normal operation, the school gates open at **8.30am**, the register is taken promptly at **8.45am** and we expect your child to be in class at that time. For infants the bell will ring at 8.45am and this is the time at which they should all enter the classroom. If your child arrives between 8.45am and 9.10am they will be given a late mark.
- At **9.15 am** the registers will be closed. In accordance with the Regulations, if your child arrives after that time they will receive a late mark that shows them to be on site, but this will **not** count as a present mark and means that they will have an unauthorised absence.
- Regular late gate checks are carried out by the Co-Head of School and/or the school's Inclusion Officer (previously known as Educational Welfare Officer or EWO).

If your child has a persistent late record you will be asked to meet with a member of the Senior Leadership Team and/or Class Teacher to resolve the problem, but you can approach us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to school. The Home School Link Worker may also be able to provide advice or assistance. You may also wish to seek advice from the Inclusion Officer.

Children Missing From School

If a child is missing from school and the school has not been contacted as to reason for absence the school will:

- make on-going attempts, beginning on the first day of any unexplained absence, to contact the pupil's parents either by telephone or email
- make further attempts to contact the parents, either by letter or by home visiting
- advise the Designated Safeguarding Lead that there are concerns about a potentially missing child (see Safeguarding Children Policy)

- contact any other schools where their siblings are known to be pupils
- check with the pupil's peer group to ascertain if they are aware of any change in the pupil's circumstances or place of residency
- contact any relevant agency, for example Children's Services or the police
- notify the local authority regarding the child's ongoing absence

Exceptional Leave of Absence - Holidays in Term time

Family holidays should take place during the school holiday dates that are published up to 2 academic years in advance. Government guidelines state that no holidays should be taken during term time so the school is unable to authorise any holiday requests. In very exceptional circumstances please complete the "Application for Leave of Absence for Exceptional Circumstances" form available for the school office.

Fixed Penalty Notices – Information direct from Surrey County Council

Penalty Notices are issued:

- To address pupil's poor attendance by demonstrating that parental failure to ensure children attend school regularly will not be tolerated and;
- To deter parents from taking children out of school during term time without the authorisation of the school

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013, which became law on 1st September 2013 state that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are "exceptional circumstances". The Headteacher should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if leave is granted.

Penalty notices may also be used by the Local Authority in the following circumstances:

- Unauthorised absences or late arrival after the closure of registration, on 7 occasions in any six week period (not including school closures).
- Pupils identified by Police and Inclusion Officers engaged on Truancy Patrols, who have incurred unauthorised absences.
- When an excluded pupil is found in a public place during school hours within the first 5 days of an exclusion without justifiable reason.
- The issuing of a penalty notice for unauthorised leave of absence may be considered appropriate in the following circumstances: Unauthorised leave of absence in term time without the authorisation of the school. (5 days/10 sessions or more within a 3 month period – this DOES NOT need to be consecutive).

The penalty is £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice, rising to £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days of receipt of the notice. If the penalty is not paid in full by the end of the 28-day period the Local Authority must prosecute the recipient for failing to ensure regular school attendance under section 444 Education Act 1996.

Please be aware that **each** parent is liable to receive a Penalty Notice for **each** child who incurs unauthorised absences, for example, if there are two parents and one child, each parent will receive one Penalty Notice. If there are two parents and two children incurring unauthorised absences, each parent will receive two Penalty Notices, which in this case would amount to £120 each if paid within 21 days.

The North East Surrey Inclusion Service

Parents are expected and encouraged to contact the school at an early stage and work together with school staff in resolving problems together. This approach is nearly always successful.

If this does not resolve the problem, the school will refer your child to the **North East Surrey Inclusion Service**. They are independent of the school and can provide impartial advice.

The Inclusion Officer will work together with you and school in order to resolve the difficulty and return your child to regular attendance. If, after all efforts have been tried, there is persistent unauthorised absence; these officers can use sanctions such as Penalty Notices or prosecutions in the Magistrates Court.

Full details and information leaflets are available from the school and from the Local Authority.

Telephone Numbers/Contact Details

There are times when we need to contact parents/carers in an emergency and about other things including absence from school. We must have two contact telephone numbers and parent/carer details.

We need your help in ensuring that you have provided us with up to date telephone numbers and contact details – without these, something important may be missed.

We will make regular checks on telephone numbers and contact details throughout the year.

If your child is regularly collected from school by a child minder or other adult, please can you ensure the school also has their contact details along with the signed blue consent form.

Appendix 1: COVID-19 Guidance for the Autumn Term 2020

Although school attendance is mandatory from the start of the autumn term, there are some circumstances where pupils cannot attend school due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

These circumstances apply only where a pupil does not attend because their travel to, or attendance at, school would be:

- contrary to guidance relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) from Public Health England (PHE) and/or the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)
- prohibited by any legislation (or instruments such as statutory directions) relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19)

In line with the Secretary of State's expectation that no parent will be penalised for following official public health advice for their child not to attend a given session, non-attendance in these circumstances will not count as an absence (authorised or unauthorised) for statistical purposes.

In terms of guidance for parents during these changing times, the school will follow all guidance published by Public Health England (PHE) and The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC). For children displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or having siblings or relatives within their household who are doing so, school will follow guidance from those bodies.