

# St Mary's Catholic Primary School Blackbrook



## Attendance and Punctuality Policy

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Guidance from the DfE, 'Working together to improve attendance', 2002; St Mary's Blackbrook Catholic Primary school is committed to providing an **outstanding education** for **ALL** our pupils and we recognise that good attendance is central to this. Pupils need to attend school regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them by law. St Mary's fully recognises its responsibilities to ensure pupils are in school and on time, therefore, having access to learning for the maximum number of days and hours. Any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning.

Regular and punctual school attendance is important.

Our Policy applies to all children registered at this school and this Policy is made available on our school website to all parents/carers of pupils who are registered at our school.

This Policy has been written to adhere to the relevant Children Acts, Education Acts, Regulations and Guidance from the Department for Education in addition to guidance from St Helens Local Authority.

Although parents/carers have the legal responsibility for ensuring their child's good attendance, the Head teacher and Governors at our school are committed to working closely with parents, other professionals and agencies to ensure that all pupils are encouraged and supported to develop good attendance habits.

**\*Definition of parent: Section 576 of the Education Act 1996-** A parent in relation to any child or young person, includes any person: -

- All natural parents, whether they are married or not;
- Any person who has parental responsibility for a child or young person; and,
- Any person who has care of a child or young person i.e. lives with and looks after the child.

This also includes all parents who are absent. Parental partners can be included (whether or not they are married or the natural parent of the child as they have 'care' of the child). If a pupil lives with a grandparent or older sibling as their main carer, they can also be included as they are the main care provider.

It is also important to note that even though a parent may not live in the same home as the student, that parent is still responsible for ensuring their child attends school every day.

## 2. PRINCIPLES OF ST MARY'S ATTENDANCE POLICY

The Governing Body of St Mary's places a high priority on achieving standards and feel that excellent pupil attendance and punctuality are essential. They undertake this role by monitoring whole school attendance termly and take appropriate action should it affect standards.

In order for children to achieve their potential, pupils must be highly motivated to learn and keen and eager to attend school. Regular punctual attendance will establish good habits which will support them throughout their lives. To achieve this, the Governors and staff are committed to working in partnership with parents to ensure that the school achieves a MINIMUM of 96% attendance throughout the school.

The Government expects us to:

- Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence (less than 91%);
- Ensure every pupil has access to a suitable education, to which they are entitled; and, act early to address patterns of absence.

<b>Attendance during one school year</b>	<b>equals this number of days absent</b>	<b>which is approximately this many weeks absent</b>	<b>which means this number of lessons missed (5 lessons per day)</b>
95%	9 days	2 weeks	50 lessons
90%	19 days	4 weeks	100 lessons
85%	29 days	6 weeks	150 lessons
80%	38 days	8 weeks	200 lessons

### 3. NATIONAL CONTEXT

The 1996 Education Act, (section 444) states that parents (including non-related adult carers in the child's household) have a **legal responsibility** to ensure that those of compulsory school age are educated, either by '**regular**' attendance at school or 'otherwise'. The 2008 Education and Skills Act, (section 155) specifies the same requirement regarding regular attendance at alternative provision.

**The duty on parents is to ensure that their children are educated, either at school or 'otherwise'.** Education is therefore compulsory. In terms of 'otherwise', children may be educated by their parents at home, by a private tutor or in establishments other than schools, i.e. – F.E. colleges from the age of 14, special units, hospitals or in alternative educational programmes or work experience. The law allows parents to choose the alternative options, provided they can demonstrate to the Local Authority that the education is full-time and 'suitable' to the child's education needs, up until the relevant leaving-date for all young people.

Schools must enter pupils on the admission register and attendance register from the beginning of the first day on which the school has agreed, or been notified, that the pupil will attend the school.

For most students the expected first day of attendance is the first day of the school year. Every amendment made to the admission register and the attendance register must include: the original entry; the amended entry; the reason for the amendment; the date on which the amendment was made; and the name and position of the person who made the amendment.

### 4. DAILY PROCEDURES

The school is **legally** required to register students twice daily. Registers are marked in the morning between 8.45 am and 9am and in the afternoon between 1.00 and 1.15 (due to staggered lunch times). It is essential that all students are registered on both occasions.

School doors open at 8.45am when all pupils/students should be in their form/classroom, in preparation for the register being taken. **It is a legal requirement that a register is taken at the start of the day.** Not only does the process allow us to monitor attendance but also to act as a student checklist in respect of health and safety issues – e.g. Fire Drill

Each year a school calendar is sent out and is also on the website, which clearly indicates the days when your child is expected to be in school.

## 5. ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL

Regular attendance at school is the responsibility of parents and carers. Under the 1996 Education Act, parents commit an **offence** if the child does not attend school regularly. ***If your child cannot come to school because of illness you should advise the school on the first day of absence by telephone.*** If no message is received, we will assume that your child is absent without your permission. We will then make every effort to contact you. The school requires **two** emergency contact numbers. It is essential that the school is kept informed of changes of contact details such as phone numbers and addresses. Parents can use the Parentapp to check and submit any changes to personal details.

**Once contact (verbal and/or written) has been made with the parent the school will determine if the absence is to be authorised or unauthorised.**

The school will only **authorise** a medical absence if the circumstances are unavoidable. The school has the right to request medical evidence if a parent rings the school to confirm the student is unwell. This may include: a medical appointment card with one appointment entered, slip with date, pupil's name and surgery stamp, signed by GP Receptionist, letter from a professional, doctor's note, medication prescribed by a doctor, copy of prescription, print screen of medical notes, as well as letters concerning hospital appointments or any other relevant evidence. The Head Teacher may not authorise medical absence without this evidence.

Parents are asked to make routine medical and dental appointments outside school hours wherever possible. Where such appointments in school time are unavoidable, parents should inform the school in advance so a decision can be made whether to authorise the absence or not.

The school **may** authorise absence under certain specific circumstances. However, the parent must contact the Headteacher in advance to secure authorisation. Sporting events or trials and theatre performances will not be authorised. Participation in acts of religious worship **might** be authorized, depending on the circumstances and length of absence.

Parents/carers are encouraged to read the Public Health England publication 'Guidance on Infection Control in Schools and other childcare settings' (September 2014) as it provides useful guidance on whether an illness necessitates students taking time off school.

## 6. UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL

Unauthorised absence is where a school is not satisfied with the reasons given for the absence. Such circumstances may include:

- Parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily
- Absences where no medical evidence has been provided
- Children who arrive at school late after registration closes (9.30am)
- No explanation is forthcoming
- The school is dissatisfied with the explanation
- The pupil is absent for **unexceptional** special occasions eg. birthday
- The pupil is away from school on a family holiday without permission
- A student attends a medical appointment in the morning but then fails to return to school for afternoon lessons
- An absence when no reason is given or evidence is not available to support the reason provided.

Our school may request penalty charge notices to address unauthorised absence.

## **7. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, SAFEGUARDING AND CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION.**

A child going missing from education is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect. School staff will follow the school's procedures for dealing with children that go missing from education, particularly on repeat occasions, to help identify the risk of abuse and neglect, including sexual exploitation, and to help prevent the risks of their going missing in future, (Keeping Children Safe in Education (updated September 2024) and Children Missing in Education Nov 2013, updated Sept 2016).

### **Notifying the Local Authority**

Our school notify the Local Authority of any pupil/student who fails to attend school regularly after making reasonable enquiries or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of 10 days or more. (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 regulation 12.

The school (regardless of designation) must also notify the Local Authority of any pupil/student who is to be deleted from the admission register.

Our school will demonstrate that we have taken reasonable enquiries to ascertain the whereabouts of children that would be considered 'missing'.

**Where a child leaves our school without a destination or another school is not identified, our school follow St Helens Council Children Missing Education Procedures**

## **8. DEALING WITH PUPILS WHO GO MISSING AND LEAVE THE SCHOOL PREMISES WITHOUT PERMISSION**

If a child leaves the school without permission the school has developed a flow chart for all staff to refer to, clearly outlining the steps to be taken. Staff are reminded of this flow chart at termly safeguarding briefings.



## 9. RELUCTANCE TO GO TO SCHOOL

Sometimes students seem anxious about leaving home to go to school. They may tell you that they feel unwell or give another reason to not attend. You may notice that they are worried from things that they say e.g. that they do not want to do particular subjects, feel that they have no friends or are being bullied. If this is the case, please contact the school as soon as possible to speak to a member of the pastoral team.

## 10. LEAVE OF ABSENCE IN TERM TIME

Under the DFE 'Advice on School Attendance', parents\* can **no longer** expect schools to authorise leave of absence for the purpose of a family holiday for up to 5 school days per year. The Headteacher may not grant leave of absence during term time unless there are '**exceptional circumstances**'.

The Headteacher will also determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted. **From this perspective, leave of absence in term time is no longer a parental right and will only be authorised at the Headteacher's discretion.** Under DFE guidelines the school will notify the Local Authority if a parent/s takes leave of absence **without** the Headteacher's permission.

Under these circumstances, the school will apply to the **Local Authority** for a **Penalty Charge Notice Fine (£80-£160)** to be issued by the Local Authority. The £80 Penalty Charge Notice will need to be paid in full separately by both parents within 21 days and will rise to £160 if paid between 22 and 28 days. If the Penalty Charge Notice is not paid within 28 days, parents can be prosecuted under section 444, the Education Act 1996.

Children attending St Helens schools, including St Mary's Primary, are not allowed absence for holidays. Any absence, other than for illness or emergency medical attention, will be coded as Unauthorised, (G) – Family holiday not agreed or (O) Unauthorised absence.

Parents may choose to complete an '**Leave of Absence Form**' stating why they are removing their child during term time. This is given to the Head teacher. Only **exceptional** circumstances will be authorised.

If an 'exceptional circumstance form' is rejected, then the absence; should the parent still proceed with the removal of their child during term time; is dealt with under the **St Helens Council Code of Conduct for issuing a Penalty Charge Notice**.

The school will seek advice from the Local Authority if a student fails to return from an extended family holiday during term time and the school has made reasonable enquiries but cannot locate the student or their family. **This applies to leave of absence that are both authorised and unauthorised by the school.** As a result, our school will invoke CME procedures. The school may remove the student from roll under such circumstances, in consultation with the Local Authority. However, we will have a conversation with the Local Authority for advice on these matters before any action is taken.

## 11. PERSISTENT ABSENCE

The school has a responsibility to reduce the number of students whose attendance is below 91% over the school year. **Students with attendance below 91% fall into the 'Persistent Absentee' category.**

According to the DFE guidance '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, the parents may be guilty of an offence and can be prosecuted by the Local Authority'. In addition, 'Local Authorities have the power to prosecute parents who fail to comply with a school attendance order (section 443 of the Education Act 1996) or fail to ensure their child's regular attendance at a school (section 444 of the Education Act 1996).

When a student's attendance drops and concerns are noted, senior staff and the pastoral team will meet with parents and class teachers and discuss the concerns. Barriers to attendance will be discussed, support will be offered and parents will be reminded of the importance of regular attendance. Parents will also be reminded that penalty notices and LA intervention could be triggered if

significant improvements are not made. If despite this attendance falls below 91% (at any stage of the year) e.g. The pastoral team will track their attendance on a weekly basis. Our Home School Liaison Officer will contact parents to discuss the attendance concerns and formalise a plan to secure an improvement in attendance. The school may also consider implementing an **Attendance Contract** if the student continues to be absent from school without authorisation. This will contain improvement targets with set timescales and an overview of the support provided by the school to support the child and his/her family.

The families of PA pupil's will also be requested to attend school-based attendance panels, which can also be held in conjunction with LA Education Welfare officers.

At our school we work in partnership with the Local Authority, to raise attendance. If your child's attendance does not improve despite what support the school has put into place, a referral may be made to the Local Authority School PACE panel.

Parental failure to comply with any plan or contract may be used as evidence if the Local Authority decides to prosecute parents.

## **12. LOCAL AUTHORITY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PANEL**

### **What is the purpose of the School Attendance Panel Meeting?**

The purpose of the School Attendance Panel meeting is for you and your child to meet with Representatives from the Local Authority to identify the reasons for absence and to work together to improve attendance.

## What will happen at the School Attendance Panel Meeting?

The reasons for absence will be identified and different strategies to improve attendance will be considered:

- A supportive action plan in the form of a parenting contract will be agreed.
- An attendance target date for improvement will be set.
- The student's attendance will then be closely monitored for a period of 12 school weeks.

If the parent fails to attend without reasonable justification this could result in a Penalty Charge Notice being issued to parents/carers or court proceedings under the 'Single Justice' process. Under section 444, a **Penalty Charge Notice will be issued for £60 to parents**. This will be issued to both parents even if one of the parents does not live with the student. Each parent will have 21 days to make payment. This will rise to £120 if the initial fine is paid between 22 and 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the Local Authority. **There is no right of appeal by parents against the penalty charge notice**. Failure to pay the Penalty Charge Notice Fine will result in further legal action being taken by the courts, with the maximum fine currently £2,500, a community order or three months in prison.

## What happens next?

Whilst the intention of the School Attendance Panel meeting is that the attendance will improve, if the attendance deteriorates by the target review date the Local Authority may recommend legal action is taken. This could include prosecution in the Magistrates' Court, Education Supervision Orders or Parenting Orders.

**Issuing Penalty Charge Notices:** Each parent receives a penalty charge notice for each child who has unauthorised absence. The penalty is £80 or £160 depending on how soon payment is made. So, if there are two parents and two children the total penalties could be up to £640. Failure to pay the penalty charge notices in St Helens may result in prosecution.

**Taking parents to court for unauthorised absence:** Education Act 1996 Section 444(1) - court can fine each parent up to £1000 per child, order payment of prosecution costs and/or impose a Parenting Order.

**Taking parents to court for persistent unauthorised absence:** Education Act 1996 Section 444(1A) - court can fine each parent up to £2,500 per child, order payment of the prosecution costs, impose a Parenting Order and/or sentence you to a period of imprisonment of up to 3 months.

Under the 1989 Children Act the Local Authority has the power to issue an **Education Supervision Order** (ESO) and place a child under their supervision on the grounds that the child is not being 'properly educated' and is in danger of 'significant harm'. The Local Authority can issue an order if the child is persistently absent from school. The Local Authority appointed 'Supervisor' can give 'directions' to the parents on how the child should be educated and work with the parent to ensure the child attends school regularly.

Under the 2003 Anti-Social Behaviour Act, if a student continues to have attendance issues after a parent has been convicted, the courts can also issue a **Parenting Order**. This legally requires the parents to participate in a programme of parenting support and counselling. If the unauthorised absence continues, a new case will be brought against the parent/s but previous parental failure to engage with the school and Local Authority can be cited.

### 13. PUNCTUALITY

As you may be aware, the law treats some persistent lateness in the same way as irregular attendance and parents may be prosecuted by the Local Authority if late arrival is not resolved.

#### **Poor punctuality can lead to your child:**

- Missing vital learning and the opportunity to have a settled start to the school day
- Feeling embarrassed in front of their friends.
- Learning bad habits which could affect their employability in the future.

Minutes late per day during the school year	Equal days' worth of teaching lost in a year
5 minutes	3.4 days
10 minutes	6.9 days
15 minutes	10.3 days
20 minutes	13.8 days
30 minutes	20.7 days

## Late Procedures

Children, who arrive late and have gone to the office entrance, must be signed in by their parent/carer or appropriate adult, a reason for the lateness is also requested.

The admin and pastoral staff will:

- update the SIMS system with their mark. Adults of EYFS children will wait with their child until it is convenient for the child to be taken to class.
- Monitor children who frequently arrive late, parents will be contacted and a referral to the linked AHT will be considered.
- The Local Authority /other member of staff is to carry out unannounced 'Late Gate' sessions to challenge parents over reasons for poor punctuality.
- Children who arrive late after the registers have closed due to a medical appointment will be marked M

Any child arriving after 9:30am (or whatever time) for any reason other than medical will be marked **U** (late after registers closed).

Children who have to leave for any reason throughout the day should be signed out at the main office by their parent/carer or appropriate adult. This information will be recorded on SIMS. This is strongly discouraged. Parents are requested to make dental or medical appointments outside of school hours.

## 14. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### IMPROVING ATTENDANCE – WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:

- Provide **two** emergency contact numbers to the school.
- Notify the school on the first day of absence.
- Try to make all medical appointments (doctors, dentist and hospital) out of school time. Obviously, this is not always possible but, in such cases, try to minimise the disruption to the day by getting an early morning appointment so that your child can attend afterwards OR a late afternoon appointment so that she can complete most of her timetable before leaving.
- Encourage your child to take responsibility for being on time for school ensuring they have a realistic bedtime and will not be too tired to get up in the morning for school. Equipment should be prepared the night

before.

- Discourage your child from staying overnight with friends during the week. This sometimes leads to them both being late (or not attending at all) the next day.
- Leave of absence during term time is not a parental right. If there are special or exceptional circumstances, please contact the Head teacher and a decision will be made if the absence can be authorised or not.
- Talk positively about going to school.
- Monitor your child's internet and social media use to ensure they are not experiencing any difficulties that may prevent them from wanting to attend school.
- Take any worries seriously but do not show that you are unduly concerned. Believe that they will be sorted out. Contact school before the concerns escalate.

### IMPROVING ATTENDANCE – WHAT SCHOOL DOES:

- Marks the registers in accordance with the law twice a day.
- Carry out robust first-day calling procedures
- Informs any parents/carers who have not contacted the school, of the absence of their child on a particular day.
- Maintains records and monitors attendance of students on a regular basis.
- Authorises absences in accordance with the government guidelines. Please note that **only** the school can authorise absence.
- Contacts parents / carers when the attendance falls below acceptable levels and/or when particular patterns of absence are causing concerns.
- Encourage parents to accept support through an Early Help Assessment where it is deemed appropriate.
- Monitor pupils who are supported by the In Year Fair Access Panel and those who attend alternative provision including Complimentary Education. Attendance certificates are gained weekly for any pupils who attend off site provision and first day response information is requested from the alternative provision, should any child fail to attend.
- Work with external agencies to maintain good attendance contribute to multi-agency meetings to review progress and agree on actions and to

support the student/family with any issues that may affect attendance and punctuality to school.

- Provides reintegration support for students returning from absence.
- Maintains a range of strategies to encourage good attendance by means of rewards.
- Inform parents of an individual pupil's attendance record each term at Parents' Evening.
- Works with relevant external agencies if a students' attendance becomes a concern, i.e. – Social Care, Early Help Services, Police, YOT, SEND.
- Make referrals to the Local Authority School Attendance Panel where pupils' attendance levels are becoming a cause for concern.
- Make referrals to the School Nurse team where appropriate to seek advice to support the pupil.
- Works in partnership with the Local Authority to improve school attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism sometimes utilising legal interventions.
- Works closely with parents to resolve issues affecting levels of attendance

## **15. REQUEST TO ELECTIVELY HOME EDUCATE A CHILD**

Our school works with the Local Authority to ensure that parents fully understand the demands and responsibilities of elective home education (EHE). We follow up-to-date guidance that is published. If a child has an Education, Health and Care Plan or is open to a social worker we work closely with the Complementary Education Service, SEND and Childrens' Social Care.

## **16. COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS**

The school's website, Fortnightly newsletter, messaging service and Twitter accounts are used to communicate with parents.



## **REWARDS AND INCENTIVES**

### **Attendance/Punctuality Awards**

We have a whole school approach to improving attendance & punctuality. We work hard to ensure these rewards are inclusive and do not penalise individuals or classes who may be impacted via long standing medical conditions or circumstances beyond their control. We use lots of incentives to encourage pupils to attend regularly including:

#### **Certificates and prizes promoting good attendance**

Bronze, Silver and Gold Stars for 100% attendance

SAM School Attendance Matters Bear

96% Attendance Disco

Individualised and class rewards are also arranged to acknowledge improvements in attendance/punctuality

### **17. What can families do to help?**

- Let the school know as soon as possible why your child is absent
- Try to make appointments outside school time
- Do not allow your child to have time off school unless it is really necessary

If you are worried about your child's attendance at school what can you do?

- Talk to your child; it may be something simple
- Talk to the staff at school, we are all here to help
- Please do not allow your child to stay off school, this just delays your child getting support to address any concern they may have.

## **18.New Families**

At every induction meeting we discuss the importance of regular attendance with all new families. If it is an in-year admission for a child transferring from another school, the pastoral team always contacts the previous school, prior to the meeting, to obtain a clear picture of the child's strengths and attendance levels. The attendance certificate from the previous school is always shared with the new family at the induction meeting.

### **Summary**

All school staff are committed to working with our pupils and their families to ensure high levels of attendance. Please work with us to support your child to reach their true potential and remember Miss School, Miss O