

# Upton St Leonards Church of England Primary School

## Pupil Attendance Policy

### Introduction

Regular school attendance is essential if a child is to make the most of the educational opportunity available to him/her. At Upton St Leonards C of E Primary School, we take seriously our responsibility to monitor and promote the regular attendance of all our pupils. We acknowledge that irregular attendance seriously disrupts continuity of learning, undermines educational progress, can lead to underachievement and low attainment and impedes the child's ability to develop friendship groups within school.

The law concerning school attendance is set out in The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. The Government (Department for Children, Schools and Families) has issued guidance on the interpretation of this law in its publication 'Guidance on The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006' (October 2007). Our school follows this Government guidance.

The Government's minimum recommendation for attendance is 93% in every school year. Our school target and the Gloucestershire Local Authority target for primary schools are both 96%.

This policy seeks to ensure that all parties involved in the practicalities of school attendance are aware and informed of attendance matters in school and to outline the schools commitment to attendance matters. It details the responsibilities of individuals and groups involved and the procedures in place to promote and monitor pupil attendance.

We aim to raise and maintain levels of attendance by:

- promoting a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which pupils feel safe, secure and valued
- raising the awareness of the importance of a differentiated and relevant curriculum
- promoting opportunities to celebrate and reward pupil's successes and achievements
- raising awareness of the importance of good attendance
- Ensuring that attendance is monitored effectively and reasons for absences are recorded promptly and consistently.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the School Vision Statement and Aims, and the Home School Agreement.

### Responsibilities

#### Pupils

Pupils have a responsibility to themselves and others to play a positive role in the life of the school and to make the most of the educational opportunities available.

#### Parents

Parents have a duty under the law to ensure their children attend school regularly. If parents do not do this, they are liable to prosecution.

#### School

The school has the responsibility to provide an environment that is conducive in educating every individual pupil. We have a statutory responsibility to record and monitor the punctuality and attendance of pupils for both the morning and afternoon sessions.

#### The Local Authority

The Local Authority has a responsibility to provide education and promote regular attendance of all statutory school age children. Through the Education Welfare Service (EWS) the Local Authority provides support to schools and parents to fulfil their legal duty. The EWS is the enforcement agency of the LA and, as well as providing guidance and support through its officers, may take a parent to court for not fulfilling their duty. Our Educational Welfare Officer is Mrs Sharon Storey.

## School Procedures for Recording and Monitoring Attendance

### Recording

Our registers are marked in accordance with legal requirements at the beginning of the morning and afternoon sessions. The register has to record whether a pupil is present, engaged in an approved educational activity off site or absent. If a pupil is absent, the register must record whether the absence was authorised or unauthorised.

Children who arrive after 8.55 a.m. or 12.55pm (infants)/1.25pm (juniors) must go straight to the school office with an explanation of their lateness so that this can be recorded. It is vital that we know exactly who is in school at all times in case there is an emergency.

The register officially closes at 9.25am, and any pupil arriving after this will be marked absent for the session. A reason for the lateness will need to be provided and a decision made by the school to mark it as an authorised or unauthorised absence.

During the morning, the absences from that morning and the previous afternoon will be recorded onto the electronic registration system and all the present pupils marked present. The offered reasons for any 'lates' from the previous day or any absences will be assessed and the appropriate code entered into the system. The register is returned back to the class teacher before the start of the afternoon session and the register is again taken at 1pm (infants) and 1.30pm (juniors).

When a child is absent it is important that parents inform school immediately (preferably by telephone), sending a follow up letter on the child's return confirming the dates of absence and the reason. We are required by law to categorise absences by marking them with a code on the register. These categories include **authorised absences** for reasons such as illness, medical appointments, religious observance etc and **unauthorised absences**.

### Authorised and unauthorised absence

The DCSF Guidance on Applying the Education Pupil Registration Regulations (October 2007) identifies the following reasons as acceptable for recording as authorised absence:

- The child is ill or is prevented from attending by unavoidable cause
- The child is absent on days exclusively set apart for religious observance in their parents' particular faith
- The child is absent 'with leave'

It is unauthorised absence from school that carries with it the risk of prosecution.

Reasons such as shopping, birthday treats and siblings' birthdays are not unavoidable causes warranting authorised absence.

Lateness (after the register closes) without what the DCSF describes as an 'adequate explanation' must also be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

A reason for a period of absence is always required. The school will contact parents who have not offered a reason and after a three-week period will mark the absence as unauthorised if no reason is provided.

Under existing legislation, parents or carers commit an offence if a child fails to attend regularly and their absences are not authorised by the school. Depending on circumstances, such cases may result in prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996. The Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 introduced the Penalty Notice as an alternative to prosecution.

### Religious Observance

Under the regulations, schools must authorise absence that is due to religious observance but the day must be:

- exclusively set apart for religious observance; and
- set apart by the parents' religious body (not the parents).

If the religious body sets apart a single day for religious observance and the pupil applies for 4 days leave of absence the school is only required to allow one day; the rest is discretionary leave. All requests for discretionary leave must be made in advance by pupils' parents.

### Holidays in term time

There is an expectation that parents should not take pupils on holiday during term time. Schools are required to ensure that children only miss school if it is absolutely unavoidable, because of the detrimental affect that this has on pupils' attainment and therefore their future life chances.

For all holiday absence during term time, a formal written request must be made from a person with parental responsibility.

Approval for such holiday can be given by the head teacher of the school for up to 10 days in a year, and is discretionary. Holidays during term time are not an automatic right. Authorisation should be used in cases when term time is the **only option** for a family holiday (DCSF: Education (Schools and Further Education) Regulations 1981 Regulation 12).

All requests for leave of absence are treated on a case by case basis in order that we can respond to difficult circumstances whilst discouraging unnecessary absence.

When considering a request for leave of absence, we take into account:

- the amount of time requested;
- age of the pupil;
- the pupil's general absence/attendance record;
- proximity of SATs and public examinations;
- length of the proposed leave;
- pupil's ability to catch up the work;
- pupil's educational needs;
- general welfare of the pupil;
- circumstances of the request (see below);
- purpose of the leave;
- frequency of the activity; and
- when the request was made.

We agree leave of up to 10 days only in **special circumstances**, which include:

- for service personnel and other employees who are prevented from taking holidays outside term-time if the holiday will have minimal disruption to the pupil's education;
- when a family needs to spend time together to support each other during or after a crisis

It is accepted that some families may wish to visit their country of origin where they still have family ties and it is important that we are sensitive to the different issues involved when making decisions about such visits.

In exceptional circumstances, schools can approve more than 10 days holiday leave - called extended leave of absence or extended holidays. If a period over 10 days is requested, this will be referred to the Governing Body as this will be considered exceptional and the implications should be carefully considered.

Leave of absence will not be granted retrospectively and any absence without advance permission will therefore be recorded as unauthorised.

Both the DCSF and the LA recommend that holidays that are taken for the following reasons should not be authorised:

- availability of cheap holidays
- availability of the desired accommodation
- poor weather experienced in school holiday periods
- overlap with beginning or end of term

Schools do not have to agree to absence for a holiday, and we cannot and will not authorise absence for holidays in term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Holidays will not be authorised for Year 6 pupils during SATs week (May). The EWO is consulted where we are in any doubt as to whether an absence is justified or not.

### Penalty Notices

Section 23 of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 empowers designated LA officers, head teachers (and deputies and assistants authorised by them) and the Police to issue Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absence from school.

A Penalty Notice can be issued in cases of unauthorised absence, and may be appropriate where holidays have been taken in term time where the school has not authorised the absence or in cases of persistent late arrival at school.

Before a Penalty Notice is considered a pupil **must** have had at least ten sessions (equivalent to 5 days) of unauthorised absence recorded against their name within the *13-week period immediately preceding the request*.

In all but exceptional cases, Penalty Notices will be preceded by the issue of a formal warning letter that will give fifteen school days for an improvement to be effected. However, only one warning letter will be issued in any twelve-month period. If there is further unauthorised absence during the fifteen-day period a Penalty Notice will be issued.

If there is no further unauthorised absence during the fifteen-day period the case will be closed. (A further ten sessions of unauthorised absence will need to occur before another Penalty Notice request can be submitted but if the criteria are met a Penalty Notice will be issued without further warning.)

If the Penalty Notice is not paid, prosecution will proceed under Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996.

Further details about Penalty Notices can be found in the Gloucestershire County Council Penalty Notice Protocol.

### Monitoring and review

It is the responsibility of the governors to monitor overall attendance, and they will request an annual report from the Head Teacher. The governing body also has the responsibility for this policy, and for seeing that it is implemented. The governors will therefore examine closely the information provided them, and seek to ensure that our attendance figures are as high as they should be. The governors set annual targets for authorised and unauthorised absence, and will report the rates of attendance in the school prospectus and in the school profile.

Class teachers are responsible for monitoring attendance in their class, and for following up absences in the appropriate way. If they have concerns about a child's absence, they will contact the school office immediately. If there is a longer-term general worry about the attendance of a particular child, this will be reported to the Head Teacher, who will contact the parents or guardian.

All unexplained absences are investigated by the office staff on a daily basis. Where possible, parents/carers are contacted by telephone in the first instance. Thereafter 'reasons for absence' letters are sent. It is our legal duty to report to the LA continuous pupil absences of more than two weeks and on those pupils who fail to attend regularly.

This policy was approved by the Governing Body in May 2008. It will be reviewed every two years or earlier if considered necessary.