



Abbots Ripton Church of England Primary School

# Attendance Policy

**Written by: Claire Matthews (using a template provided by our Local Authority Attendance Officer – December 2022)**

**Date: March 2023**

**Review date: March 2026**

*Our church school creates a firm foundation where together, with God's help and with the help of others, we learn for life, achieve our best and grow in faith.*

## **Introduction**

We are proud of our excellent levels of attendance and actively encourage punctuality and regular attendance so that all children are able to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them.

The law expects children to be in school and on time every day. There is no right to take your child out of school and the expectation is that children will be in school every day unless they are too ill to attend or you have permission from the school not to attend.

Regular attendance at school is essential to ensure uninterrupted progress and to enable children to achieve their potential. Poor attendance can seriously affect each child's attainment in school, relationships with other children, and their ability to form lasting friendships and their confidence to attempt new work and work alongside others. We believe that the most important factor in promoting good attendance is the development of positive attitudes towards school and learning.

Throughout this policy the term 'parents' represents one parent, both parents, and/or carer(s) with whom the child resides.

## **Principles**

We aim to work together with Parent/Carers and the Local Authority Attendance Officers (LAAOs) to ensure that all children registered at school attend every day and on time, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. We aim to improve the achievement of pupils by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality by creating an ethos in which attendance and punctuality are recognised and seen to be valued by the whole school. At the same time, ensuring that our policy applies to Reception aged children in order to promote good habits from an early age. The recognised expected level of attendance at school is 100% unless pupils with chronic health issues or there are exceptional or unavoidable reasons for absence.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Achieving regular attendance and punctuality is a partnership between home and school. The school will monitor attendance for all children and will work actively with parents to ensure a regular pattern is maintained. Parent/Carers have a legal responsibility to ensure that children of statutory school age (term after the child turns five) attend school on a regular and full time basis. Permitting an absence from school without good reason is an offence. A pupil whose attendance drops to 90% each year will, over their time at primary school, have missed the equivalent of two whole terms of learning.

Parent/Carers must:

- Ensure all children registered at Abbots Ripton Church of England Primary School attend every day that they are healthy and able to do so, as they have a legal obligation to ensure their child receives a full time education.
- Inform school in advance of any medical appointments during school time, parents may on occasions be asked to provide supporting evidence from the hospital, doctor or dentist, such as appointment details card/letter/text message in relation to the time requested.
- Ensure their child arrives at school in time for registration at 8:50am. If you arrive after the gates are closed at 8:50am, parents should report directly to the office to give the reason for the lateness. Lateness is monitored and may be recorded as unauthorised.
- Inform the school as soon as possible about any child's reluctance to come to school so that any problem can be quickly identified and dealt with.

- There will be times when your son or daughter cannot attend school most obviously, when they are ill. Parents have a responsibility to contact the school as soon as possible, on the first morning of absence. This may be done by telephone (01487 773318) or by email (office@abbotsripton.cambs.sch.uk). This absence will be authorised by the school as long as the reasons are valid and you are able to provide evidence if requested.

### **Requesting leave**

- Parents are expected to avoid booking family holidays during term-time. If you intend to take your child out during school time please make an appointment to meet with the Headteacher. At this meeting you will be given a form to complete.
- Requests for leave of absence should be made at least two weeks in advance.
- Parents do not have an automatic right to withdraw pupils from school and leave of absence will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.
- Leave is not automatically authorised unless considered an exceptional circumstance. Any leave taken during term time, that has been unauthorised, could be subject to a penalty notice/fine.

### **Responsibility of the School:**

The school has a responsibility to keep registers up to date. Every half-day absence\* has to be classified by the school as authorised or unauthorised. Parents may not authorise their child's absence – only the school can do this on the basis of the explanation provided. Should parents fail to provide a satisfactory reason for their child's absence the school will record such absence as unauthorised.

Please see below for those absences classified as authorised and unauthorised.

\*Each am and pm registration count as one session each, or a whole day absent will reflect two absent sessions.

- The school will keep parents up to date on their child's attendance, and will issue a letter to initiate the 'staged approach' to improving attendance where a child's attendance causes concern. Parents should expect this when their child's attendance falls below 85% over a rolling 6 week period.
- We will support families where there are challenges with maintaining good attendance.

If applicable, support strategies with a monitoring period will be put in place to help improve the attendance or lateness of a pupil. Should a pupil's attendance or lateness continue to be a concern despite the support strategies in place, with no improvement to the expected level set by school, a referral will be made to the Local Authority Attendance Officer (LA AO) for statutory aged pupils. This could result in a penalty notice/fine, or prosecution being issued by Cambridgeshire County Council, as per section 444 Education Act 1996. This may result in a fine of up to £2500 and/or 3 months in prison.

### **Our 'staged' approach to improving attendance**

Stage 1 – Parents will receive a letter to notify them that the school are concerned by their child's attendance.

Stage 2 – Attendance will continue to be monitored and if no satisfactory improvement is made, Letter 2 will be issued. Letter 2 will inform the parents of a meeting which they are required to attend, in which an 'Attendance Improvement Meeting' Record will be completed and a set-monitoring period set up. This period will be 6 weeks.

Stage 3 – If this agreement is not effective and attendance does not improve, Letter 3 (Penalty Notice) will be sent.

## **Persistent absence**

We take Persistent Absence seriously. The law deems a child to be 'persistently absent' if their attendance falls below 90%. Much of the learning pupils miss when they are absent from school needs to be caught up, which has a direct impact on staff. At times, this catch up may not be possible and the gaps will not be made up. These pupils will be at a disadvantage and there is clear evidence of a direct link between poor attendance at school and low levels of achievement. Parents and Carers put themselves in the position of being issued with a Penalty Notice if their child is deemed to be persistently absent without reasonable explanation.

## **Absences that are acceptable to authorise include:**

### If a child is ill

Parents/carers must inform us on the first day of absence by telephone (01487 773318) and every day thereafter if a pupil is still unable to attend.

If your child is absent due to vomiting or diarrhoea they should not return to school for the next 48 hours after the last episode of sickness. This in line with NHS guidelines to reduce the risk of infection to other children and adults in the school.

If illness extends for more than 5 days, parents may then be asked for medical evidence.

### If a child has a medical/dental appointments

Please arrange appointments during holidays or out of school hours. Understandably, there may be times when this is not possible, please inform the school office in advance of the appointment and provide appointment letters or slips as supporting evidence. This absence cannot be authorised without this evidence.

### If there is a close family bereavement

Please let us know as soon as possible if there is a family bereavement. We want to make sure that we treat children sensitively and ensure they are appropriately supported if/when they are experiencing difficulties.

### If they belong to a religious body which sets aside days for religious observance

Please let us know in advance if this is the case and which days for your son/ daughter will be involved. Only day (s) exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong to will be acceptable.

## **Unauthorised Absence**

An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of the school, even with the support of the Parent/Carers, such as day trips, shopping, visiting family or birthdays.

Absence which has not been authorised is recorded as unauthorised. The school has a duty of care to follow up on unauthorised absence and therefore will contact parents/carers to investigate the cause.

- You will be contacted by phone, the morning of the absence if there has been no communication from you.
- After 3 days of absence without adequate explanation, or earlier in the case of a persistent absentee (attendance below 90%), the reasons behind the absence will be investigated by school and potentially referred to the LAEO (Local Authority Attendance Officer). If we are concerned about a child's welfare we will not wait 3 days to take action such as visiting the home.
- Parents of persistently absent students will be alerted through our staged approach letters and as a condition of this will be expected to attend a meeting to resolve problems of attendance and agree a support agreement.

- Legal action may be taken if persistent problems cannot be resolved.

Any unauthorised leave of absence over a certain period could result in a Penalty Notice fine of £60 per parent per child being issued by the local authority. This money does not come to school. When a referral is made, the referral goes to a legal panel to decide whether a penalty notice should be issued.

The definition of parent in relation to a Penalty Notice includes step-parent and the partner of a parent who lives in the same household.

*See Appendix A: Absence from School for Exceptional Circumstances – A Guide for Parents*

### **Arrival and Registration**

Children may arrive any time from 8:40am for a prompt 8:50am start to the school day. The register is taken twice a day and each day is comprised of two sessions (am registration and pm registration).

Arrival after 8:50am will be marked as late (L) on the register.

Arrival after 9am will be marked as an unauthorised late mark, which is considered as an unauthorised absence for the morning session as registers have closed. A parent will need to sign their child in at the office, stating the reason for absence.

### **Strategies for Promoting Attendance / Punctuality:**

These include:

- Regularly communicating with parents/carers on attendance matters through the newsletter, on the website and through individual letters.
- Provision of clear information on the school website.
- Sending LA leaflets to all new parents/carers.
- Reporting to the Governing Body via the Headteacher's Report.
- Reintegrating pupils who have been absent for any extended periods of time through a structured and tailored programme.
- Raising awareness of this attendance policy.
- Ensuring regular communication via email (if necessary) reiterates the importance of attendance.
- Using our staged approach.

## Absence from School for

### Exceptional Circumstances – A Guidance for Parents – March 2021

The information below is designed to help parents understand how and when leave of absence in exceptional circumstances may be granted.

The decision to authorise absence is at the head teacher's discretion based on their assessment of the situation. Circumstances vary from school to school and so there can be no absolute rules on this subject.

Term times are for education. This is the priority. Children and families have 175 days off school to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. Head teachers will rightly prioritise attendance. Generally, absences **will not** be granted during term time and **will only** be authorised by the head teacher in exceptional circumstances.

Penalty Notices for term time leave are issued based on information and referrals received from schools. The Local Authority cannot override the decision made by the Headteacher to unauthorise the absence. If you have any reasons to believe the Penalty Notice should not have been issued please contact the school within 10 working days. There is no statutory right of appeal against the issuing of a Penalty Notice.

COVID 19 Pandemic impact- The disapplication of the law around issuing of PN fines resulted in temporary suspension of fines as the absences were authorised. From the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021, pupil attendance will be mandatory and the usual rules on attendance will apply. Therefore, the ability to issue sanctions, including Penalty Notices, in line with Local Authority's PN code of conduct will also be resumed.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What are exceptional circumstances?**

Exceptional circumstances are one off events which are unavoidable, examples may include the death of a close relative, attendance at a funeral, respite care of a looked after child, a housing crisis which prevents attendance.

### **I explained my exceptional circumstances to the school yet I was still issued with a PN fine. Can this be reviewed by the Council?**

No. Only the head teacher of a school can authorise any absence under exceptional circumstances. The County Council cannot override any decisions made by the head teacher. If a request is sent to the Council then a PN fine will be issued based on the information received.

### **My child's attendance record is generally good, can I still be issued a fine for short time unauthorised holiday?**

The Cambridgeshire Penalty Notice Code of Conduct allows Penalty Notice fine to be issued for holiday taken for 3 days or more.

### **Which parent receives the fine?**

Where both parents live together and have day-to-day care and also any absent parent who has frequent contact with the child and is named in the child's school records may receive a fine for each of their children. This will include parents who allow their child to go on holiday with another family member or friend of the family.

### **Who is fined when parents do not live together?**

The situation can become complicated where parents do not live together and both wish to remove their child from school at separate times during the same academic year. Where parents are separated, if an absence request is submitted by the parent not involved with the absence, then both parents may be fined.

### **Who is considered to have parental responsibility?**

The definition of a parent is anyone who has parental responsibility for the child and/or any adult with day to day care and responsibility. (Section 576 Education Act 1996). This will include step parents and cohabiters, partners of older pupils if the partner is over 18 years of age and they are living together, other relatives with residency orders.

### **What happens if I am a self-employed worker e.g. a Farmer, is an employee with fixed holiday dates, or is on a holiday rota set by my employer?**

It is advisable for parents to discuss this with their child's school prior to making any arrangements for absence during school term times. Legislation no longer allows Head teachers to authorise 10 days absence from school for a term time holiday. If you are self-employed then you are able to select when you take your annual leave.

### **We want to go on a trip of a lifetime. Could this be an authorised absence?**

No, this would constitute a family holiday. The Head teachers cannot authorise term time holidays, unless there accept the reason for leave of absence is exceptional.

### **I have a significant number of relatives abroad and may need to spend an extended period in another country. Could this be an authorised absence?**

Head teachers are bound by law to discourage families from taking trips during term time, whatever the reason given.

### **Can I have a payment plan or make part payments?**

No, The Code of Conduct does not allow part payments or payment plans.

### **The Primary school authorised the absence but I received a PN fine for my secondary school aged child. Is there no consistency?**

The Government has given the authority to individual head teachers to make their own decision based on the explanation provided by the parents. What is exceptional has not been defined by the government and therefore individual opinions may differ between head teachers. However, the county council does encourage schools to work together but at the same time take into account circumstances of the individual child's needs.

### **Could an absence to attend a religious observance or festival be an authorised absence?**

Absence that is due to religious observance must be authorised. The day should be marked as authorised where there is an element of worship associated with the religious observance. The religious observance days are set apart by the religious body of the individual religion, not determined by the parents.

**Can I receive a PN fine if my child's absence is COVID -19 related?**

For the school year 2020 to 2021, the Government has amended the Attendance Guidance to take into account instances when a pupil is not attending in circumstances relating to COVID-19.

A PN fine will not be issued when a school authorises the absence on the basis that: parents are following government guidance on self-isolation due to incidence or transmission of the coronavirus or parents are prohibited from sending children to school by any legislation relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus