



Attendance Policy

May 2016

Approved by GB: June 2016

Next review due: May 2019

Attendance matters because we believe that regular attendance at school is essential if all of our children are to benefit fully from the education we provide and develop the social responsibility needed for adult life.

As a school we aim to maintain an attendance rate of a minimum of 96%.

Aims of this policy

- Explain why good attendance is important.
- Set out the strategies used to promote attendance and punctuality.
- Explain roles and responsibilities in relation to attendance.
- Establish a set of procedures to be followed when managing issues of attendance so ensuring consistency of practice.
- Enable the school to effectively monitor, evaluate and review its practice to ensure it is striving to improve attendance.
- Meet the Education laws and guidance produced by the DfE for school attendance.

Good attendance is important because

- Statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and poor attendance.
- Children with attendance above 96% make better progress, both socially and academically.
- Regular attenders find learning more satisfying and have fewer gaps in their knowledge.
- It is important to be on time as the children have a reading session at the start of every day. Missing a few minutes each day adds up and gives a child an unsettled start to their day.

Promoting attendance and punctuality

- When returning from an absence class teachers make children feel welcome, whilst making them aware of what opportunities they have missed and helping children to catch up on what they have missed.
- Assemblies reinforcing the need for good attendance and the consequences of absence.
- Early intervention (EWO and HT or DH) meetings with families to discuss the consequences of poor attendance and reduce parentally condoned absence.
- Displays and posters around school to promote good attendance.
- Constantly remind parents of the importance of punctuality and attendance through the school prospectus, meet the new teacher evening, parent's evenings and newsletters.

The following attendance benchmarks are used:

97% outstanding

96% good

95% satisfactory

94% inadequate

Roles and responsibilities

Governors

- Monitor attendance.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Attendance Policy.

Headteacher

- Ensure that effective systems are in place to accurately monitor and reflect individual, group and whole school attendance patterns.
- Provide Governors with information to enable them to evaluate the success of the policy and practice.
- Meet with parents and carers to discuss applications for leave or attendance concerns.
- Write to parents/carers regarding any concerns about their child's attendance.
- Work in partnership with key agencies if attendance and/or punctuality is an issue.
- A summary of each child's attendance record is reported to parents in the child's summer report.

Teaching Staff and Learning Support Assistants

- Acknowledge good attendance and explain to children the benefits.
- Provide an accurate record of the attendance of each child in their class at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session.
- Where irregular attendance and/or punctuality is a concern refer the matter to the Headteacher who will then pass the information on to the Education Welfare Officer.

Office Staff

- Prepare registers setting out names in alphabetical order.
- Children's names, addresses and dates of birth inserted in the front of the register folder.
- Attendance registers must show whether an absence is authorised or unauthorised.
- Morning registration starts at 8.50am and registers remain open for 30 minutes.
- Any child arriving late after 9.20am will be marked as unauthorised absence for the morning.
- Record the reasons for absence using the correct Redbridge code.
- Contact parents/carers on the first day of a child's unexplained absence to establish the reason and record in registers.
- Monitor and track attendance patterns and prepare relevant attendance reports when necessary.
- Ensure that a satisfactory reason for every absence has been established for each child at the end of each week.
- Unauthorised absences should be calculated for each week. The number of sessions should be counted and the total recorded. A session is a morning or an afternoon and, therefore, the day comprises of two sessions.
- Make a judgement in conjunction with the Headteacher whether an absence is authorised or unauthorised.
- A late register is kept in the office providing information about the time of arrival and reason for lateness.
- Collect and store the registers safely.

Education Welfare Officer (EWO)

- Enforces the law regarding school attendance.
- Support the school through meetings and monitoring children's attendance.
- Home visits to engage hard to reach families.
- Where irregular attendance and/or punctuality causes concern, SLT will refer the matter to the Education Welfare Officer.
- Providing direct intervention with pupils who fall below target levels of attendance and devising strategies to improve their attendance in partnership with the school.
- Ensuring that borough and school policies on attendance are implemented appropriately in each individual case including the use of legal action against parents where they are failing to fulfil their child's regular school attendance.

- Working closely with schools at transition stages to ensure that identified vulnerable children are provided with all possible support to reduce the likelihood of increased non-attendance, where necessary working and liaising with partner agencies.

Parents and carers can help by:

- Ensuring their child arrives at school before 8.50am to be ready for registration.
- Contacting the school on the first morning of all absences; giving a reason and explaining when the child will return.
- Keeping the school updated and after 5 days of absence providing medical evidence.
- Not booking routine medical or dental appointments during school time. Medical appointments are counted as absence on a child's record.
- Fulfilling their legal duty to ensure their child attends school.

We value parents support in helping us to maintain high standards. Every day counts.

Leave

Parents/carers must apply for permission to authorise a term-time absence in advance. Permission should not be granted after the absence has been taken. All requests should be made by using a designated 'school' standard form and all decisions should be recorded. (Appropriate codings should be used.)

Churchfield Junior School follows Redbridge Council guidance and is committed to a policy of minimum unavoidable absence from school during term time and schools.

Churchfields Junior School will be prepared to grant only a **maximum of 3 days** absence from school for circumstances as defined in the list below as exceptional. Leave for holidays during term time will not be approved.

Exceptional Circumstances and Special Considerations

- Funeral of parent, grandparent and sibling. Subject to a maximum of 2 days. Death of a relative outside of the UK, subject to a maximum number of 3 days.
- Sudden loss of housing through eviction or domestic violence up to a maximum of 3 days.
- Out of school programmes such as music, arts or sport operating at a high standard of achievement and agreed by the L.A. The EWS will advise schools on individual circumstances.
- Time off relating to Child Entertainment Performances, which is subject to a licence being issued by EWS.
- Religious observance subject to a maximum number of 3 days.

Specific circumstances not included on the list

- Serious illness of a close relative. In principle leave should not be granted for the illness of a relative unless the head teacher is convinced that the circumstances are truly exceptional. The EWS would discuss individual circumstances with the school.

- Pilgrimages. These are rare but can result in children being away from school for significant periods of time and we would not regard them as unavoidable absences.
- Prison visits. Most prison visit can be achieved during weekends and holidays, but there may be exceptions when for example a parent is held in a prison a long way from home and when a head believes there is a justification to grant a day's leave.
- Weddings of parents and siblings. Weddings can be arranged at weekends or during holidays and are not included on the list of exceptions. If however the head teacher is convinced that there is a persuasive reason as to why a wedding cannot be held out of school time it is recommended to allow 1 day's leave. The LA would not recommend that leave for weddings abroad should be agreed in term time in view of the potential for such an absence being of considerable duration.

Where a head teacher is exercising discretion, a maximum number of 3 days is recommended. This is subject to the caveat of "avoidable absence", which should only be authorised for exceptional circumstances.

With L.A. agreement, schools may delete from roll a pupil who fails to return within 20 school days of the agreed return date.

Legal note

Parents have a legal duty to ensure their child attends school (Education Act 1996). We aim to work with families to promote attendance. However, if parents take leave (holidays) during term time they will have to pay a Penalty Notice (fine) or parents can be prosecuted (taken to court) if they fail to ensure their child attends school regularly.

When a child leaves the school and parents/carers do not let us know then children are considered to be a **Child Missing Education**. This means that the local Authority has a legal duty to carry out investigations. By letting the school know that a child is leaving school, unnecessary investigations can be avoided.

Sanctions for an Unauthorised Leave of absence without Permission

A Fixed Penalty Notice will be issued for unauthorised leave of absence (holiday) taken without permission after the first day of absence. It will be issued by the EWS following discussions with the Head.

This will incur a fine of £60.00 per child, per parent, being imposed, if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice, rising to £120.00 per child, per parent, thereafter to be paid by day 28. Subsequently, consideration will be given for the matter to be investigated by the Education Welfare Service and possible legal action.

If the penalty is not paid in full by the end of the 28 days, the Local Authority must either prosecute for the offence or withdraw the notice. This prosecution is for the offence of failing to secure attendance at school not for non-payment of the fine.

Prosecutions are brought under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

There is no statutory right of appeal against the issuing of a Penalty Notice.

Arrangements for payment will be detailed on the penalty notice.

This will be reviewed on an annual basis.

In cases where unauthorised leave of absence has been taken without permission, which exceeds 20 days or more, the school should advise the EWS in order that steps can be implemented with a view to removing the child from roll. (The EWS will have a checklist of requirements before a pupil can be removed from the school roll.) A decision will be taken by the EWS whether to implement legal proceedings under the Education Act 1996, Section 444 and (1a).

Circumstances where a Fixed Penalty Notice may be issued

A Fixed Penalty Notice can only be issued in cases of leave of absence (holiday taken without permission). In cases where families contain more than one poor-attending pupil multiple issue may occur but this will be the subject of careful consideration and co-ordination. There will be no restriction on the number of times a parent/carer may receive a formal warning of an issue of a Penalty Notice.

Regarding the deliberate taking of a holiday in term time without school permission (where it must be clearly demonstrated that parent/carer understood that permission had not or would not have been given) and this has created a period of unauthorised absence.

The Redbridge Children's Authority must consider every aspect of a pupil's wellbeing before considering whether a Penalty Notice would be appropriate. This must include discussions with head teacher, the assigned EWO and any other significant person who have involvement with or knowledge of the pupil/family.

Absence due to ill health

Any absence relating to illness of 5 days or more should be supported by medical evidence. Prescriptions will not be accepted for medication of paracetamol or calpol, as these can be self-administered within the school environment.

Authorised absence

Authorised absence is defined as:

- When a pupil is absent as a result of illness and an acceptable explanation has been received.
- Religious Observance (as defined in the exemptions list).
- Where a child has been temporarily excluded from school.
- Medical/dental appointments (sight of appointment card should be requested). Appointments should be made outside of school hours wherever possible and the minimum amount of time should be taken.
- Exceptional circumstances (unavoidable absence).

Punctuality

Persistent lateness does not constitute as full school attendance (Section 444 of Education Act, 1996). A uniform approach on the close of morning register is required 30 minutes after the opening of the school day.

Pupils arriving after the opening of the register up to and including the 30th minute, will receive an 'L' (Late) coding and those arriving after the 31st minute will receive an unauthorised absence 'U' coding.

All pupils arriving late either with the 'L' or 'U' coding should sign in at school reception in order that times of arrival can be recorded to be used in evidence in the event of court action. This information should be shared with the schools allocated Education Welfare Officer.

The EWS will challenge persistent lateness both before and after the close of registration, schools (after their pre-referral action) should make the necessary referral to the EWS.

An Education Welfare Officer will undertake a late gate inspection at the request of the school.

Sanctions for Persistent Lateness

Legal proceedings can be initiated on behalf of the Local Authority under the Education Act 1996, Section 444 (1) and (1a) after all other formal procedures have been exhausted.

Exceptional Circumstances and Special Consideration for late arrivals

- Adverse weather and/or travel conditions
- Delay by a school bus/local authority vehicle
- Pupil on a reduced timetable

Responding to continued non-attendance

Although it has been stressed that prompt, concerted action by vigilant teachers is the single most effective response to non-attendance, additional action is necessary if patterns of intermittent or persistent absence continue.

Further investigation into the causes of the non-attendance must to be carried out in cases of continued absence. Consideration should be given to those factors, which may influence attendance at school. Bullying, school refusal, parentally condoned absence, disaffection and learning difficulties are just a few of the many reasons children have given for continued absence from school.

Once investigation has discovered the cause of their absence from school, it is important to negotiate a return to school programme that everyone is committed to, including the pupil, their parent's class teacher(s) and any support agencies. Without an agreed, well-structured programme the pupil is likely to feel unsure about their return. Particular support in language, literacy, numeracy or for special education needs should be identified and a plan made for their inclusion in the return to school programme.

In very exceptional circumstances the 'return to school programme' might consider whether it is appropriate for the head teacher to apply for modification or disapplication from the National Curriculum for individual students. Arrangements to modify or disapply from the National Curriculum must comply with sections 16-19 of The Education Reform Act 1988, The Education Act 1996.

Returning to school after an absence can be difficult for some pupils. A great deal of persuasion by parents, EWO or teacher may have taken place to get the child to agree their return to school

programme. Often, considerable courage is being shown by the pupil. Therefore, pupils need to feel secure in the knowledge that their return will be handled sensitively by staff.

Governors have a valuable role to play in establishing the importance of attendance at individual schools. They help schools to focus upon the need for a clear policy on attendance and ensure that data on attendance is accurate and meaningful, and that trends and patterns are closely monitored. The Authority recommends that governors receive termly reports on attendance for this purpose. Governors should support the initiatives, which are taken by a school to promote good attendance by monitoring the relative success of such measures.

The Education Welfare Service, Managing Response To Continued Non-Attendance

Formal Procedures

At the initial stage, the school has responsibility for monitoring attendance through rigorous registration and follow-up procedures.

This may be by (i) first day contact (ii) followed by a number of letters - at least 2 preferably 3. If no improvement in attendance is shown, the school would be expected to consult with the EWO.

At the regular consultation meeting between teachers/or nominated person and the EWO a decision will be undertaken as to whether a formal referral is made to the EWS.

STAGE 2 - EWO takes responsibility

Referral form completed. In the main (unless in exceptional circumstances) all absences should be confirmed as unauthorised. The reason for this is that if schools are authorising they are in effect consenting and/or accepting the absences and the EWO role is to question and explore such decisions. The EWO will undertake a home visit within 5 working days, preferably unannounced. If no reply a calling card is left requesting contact. If no further response, the EWO can either offer an appointment for a subsequent home visit or for a school-based meeting.

After this procedure and an agreed monitoring period, if no significant improvement is made, guidance should be sought from line managers and a possible decision may be made to send a court-warning letter. Thereafter, a school attendance consultative meeting should be arranged.

The EWO will agree a date with line manager, book the room and send out necessary invitations to all parties, i.e. parents, school, other agencies such as social services, health, YOT, to be present at the meeting. The EWO will produce a brief report to present at the meeting with a chronology of events. At the school attendance meeting consideration will be given to educational, social, emotional, medical and psychological factors that may be contributing to the poor attendance. The meeting would consider alternative forms of education/action and make recommendations for referral to other agencies/court or a review date may be set.

The EWO will type the recommendation letter after the meeting and provide a copy to line manager and school.

EWS steps to process referrals

Referral received

- - On the initial home visit it is important that all family details are checked and it is vital that names of any siblings and their schools are noted. Parental responsibility must also be confirmed.

- At least 2 home visits to be made and/or a school based meeting.
- Discussion with senior.
- If no improvement, warning letter, then a file opened.
- If no improvement a SACM (School Attendance Consultative Meeting) will be held.
- Meeting held and recommendations made.

Following the school attendance consultative meeting

The senior must check recommendation letter and sign, which will now be typed by EWO (a template will be distributed). The EWO will also be responsible for distributing copies. Should the case be referred to court, the EWO will submit an application to court and a Section 9 witness statement. Prior to the court date, a certificate of attendance must be completed and signed by the relevant Head teacher.

At any stage in the procedures, a further meeting may be held (with agreement by the Senior) to take into account any changed circumstances.

The Use of Legal Proceedings

The Education Welfare Service initiates legal proceedings on behalf of Redbridge Children's Authority against parents where children of compulsory school age are not receiving full time education by regular attendance at school or otherwise. It is The Redbridge Children's Authority has a legal duty to serve attendance orders on parents and to initiate proceedings against parents of a child who is in breach of a school attendance order or on parents who are failing to ensure the regular attendance of their child at school. The Redbridge Children's Authority must first consider whether or not to apply for an Education Supervision Order with respect to the child (Section 437, 446 and 447 of the Education Act 1996).

A request for a parenting contract can be made for unauthorised absence under Section 19 of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003.

The measures apply to Community, Foundation or Voluntary aided schools, Maintained nursery schools, Colleges and Pupil Referral Units

Parenting Contract Criteria

- Where parents/carers have appeared reluctant to engage with school/EWS in addressing their child's poor attendance
- Where a parent identifies a need for expert help with parenting issues
- A protocol is being produced to ensure that education related parenting contracts and parenting orders might be applied fairly and consistently across all schools.
- Parenting Contracts can be used as evidence of non-compliance in court evidence but initially the parent will enter into this contract voluntarily.

Review

This policy is reviewed by staff and governors every three years. Parents are most welcome to request copies of this document and comments are invited from anyone involved in the life of the school.