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# Attendance Policy

October 2024

*Version 3.0*

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## **1 Introduction:**

- 1.1 This is a successful school, and your child plays their part in making it so. We aim for an environment which enables and encourages all members of the community to reach out for excellence. For our children to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend regularly, and your child should be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.
- 1.2 It is very important therefore that you make sure that your child attends regularly, and this policy sets out how together we will achieve this.

## **2 Why regular attendance is so important**

- 2.1 Any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning. Any pupil's absence disrupts teaching routines so may affect the learning of others in the same class. Children are best safeguarded from exploitation and other risks in the wider community by attending school regularly where they are supervised by qualified and caring professionals.
- 2.2 Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is your legal responsibility and permitting absence from school without a good reason creates an offence in law and may result in prosecution.
- 2.3 This policy works to meet the mandatory requirements laid out by the UK Government in their document: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

## **3 Working together to improve attendance**

- 3.1 The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families. Good attendance begins with school being somewhere pupils want to be and therefore the foundation of securing good attendance is that school is a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all pupils are keen and ready to learn.
- 3.2 To help us all to focus on this we will:
  - *Give you details on attendance in our regular weekly newsletter*
  - *Report to you termly on how your child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainments*
  - *Celebrate good attendance*

3.3 We work together with parents/carers and external agencies when necessary to:

- *Expect: high standards of attendance from all pupils*
- *Monitor: identify patterns of poor attendance as soon as possible*
- *Listen and understand: listen to and understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.*
- *Facilitate support: help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school.*
- *Formalise support: work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond if absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with*
- *Enforce: enforce attendance through statutory intervention when all other avenues have been exhausted.*

## 4 Attendance Procedures

4.1 A register will be taken twice a day, in the morning and in the afternoon. Morning registration opens at 8:50am and closes 20 minutes later at 9:10am. Afternoon registration opens at 13:15 and closes 20 minutes later.

4.2 Children arriving after registration has started but before registration has closed will be given a L for late in the register. If your child has a persistent late record, you will be asked to meet with a member of the School Leadership Team and/or Attendance Officer to resolve the problem, but you can approach us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to school on time.

4.3 Children arriving after registration is closed will be given a U in the register unless another absence is valid (for example attending a medical appointment). This is counted as an unauthorised absence.

4.4 If your child is absent we will give them an N in the register until we find out the reason for the absence. You must:

- Contact us as soon as possible on the first day of absence
  - Send a note in on the first day they return with an explanation of the absence – you must do this even if you have already telephoned us
- Or you can call into school and report to reception, who will arrange for a member of staff to speak with you. I

4.5 If your child is absent, we will:

- Telephone or text you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you;
- Visit you at home if we have not heard from you by day 3 of absence;
- Invite you in to discuss the situation with our Attendance Officer and/or Pastoral Leaders, Assistant Headteacher or Headteacher if absences persist;

- Refer the matter to the County Attendance Team if attendance moves below 80%.

## **5 Understanding types of absence:**

- 5.1 Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school (not by the parents), as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required, preferably in writing.
- 5.2 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. If this occurs, school will require evidence of the appointment to be able to authorise the absence.
- 5.3 Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider
- reasonable and for which no "leave" has been given. This type of absence can lead to the Local Authority (County Attendance Team) using sanctions and/or legal proceedings. This includes:
  - Parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily
  - truancy before or during the school day
  - absences which have never been properly explained
    - children who arrive at school too late to get a mark
    - shopping, looking after other children or birthdays
    - day trips and holidays in term time which have not been agreed
    - excessive illness without medical evidence
- 5.4 Whilst any child may be off school because they are ill, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents and the child. If your child is reluctant to attend, never cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and usually make things worse.
- 5.5 You can support your child by:
- Ensuring regular and early bedtimes
  - Helping with homework
  - Having uniform and equipment prepared the night before
  - Providing a healthy breakfast
  - Reporting any academic or social concerns promptly
  - Retaining open & honest communication with your child's school
  - Being positive about school (even if your own experience was less than positive)
  - Encouraging your child to invite friends home for play dates

## **6 Persistent and severe absenteeism**

- 6.1 A pupil becomes a 'persistent absentee' when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year for any reason (equivalent to 1 day or more a fortnight across the full school year).
- 6.2 A pupil becomes a 'severe absentee' when they miss 50% or more schooling across the school year for any reason.
- 6.3 We will work together to put additional targeted support in place to remove any barriers to attendance and reengage these pupils. We will sensitively consider some of the reasons for absence and understand the importance of school as a place of safety and support for children who might be facing difficulties, rather than reaching immediately for punitive approaches. Absence at this level is doing significant damage to any child's academic and social progress which can have lifelong consequences.
- 6.4 We monitor all absence thoroughly and prioritise support for any child who is severely absent (or is at risk of becoming severely absent).
- 6.5 Persistent and severely absent pupils are tracked and monitored carefully through our pastoral system, and we also combine this with academic mentoring where absence affects attainment.
- 6.6 All our persistently or severely absent pupils and their parents are subject to an Action Plan and the plan may include allocation of additional support through a mentor or a learning support assistant, use of circle time, individual incentive programmes and participation in group activities around raising attendance. All cases are also automatically made known to the County Attendance team. If your child becomes absent pupil, we will seek your consent to complete an Early Help Assessment with you and consider convening a Team Around the Family.

## **7 Contact details:**

- 7.1 There are times when we need to contact parents about lots of things, including absence, so we need to have your current contact numbers and email addresses at all times. So, help us to help you and your child by making sure we always have an up-to-date number and email address – if we don't then something important may be missed. There will be regular checks on contact details throughout the year. Please ensure we have both parents and at least a third emergency contact person's contact details.

## **8 The County Attendance Team:**

- 8.1 Parents are expected to contact school at an early stage and to work with the staff in resolving any problems together, this is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be sorted out in this way, the school may refer the child to the County Attendance Team at Oxfordshire County Council. At the school's request, they may issue a Penalty Notice per parent/carer, per child (currently £60 rising to £120 if unpaid after 21 days. If unpaid after 28 days a summons to Court will be issued for each unpaid Penalty Notice for prosecutions in the Magistrates Court. This can result in a criminal record and a fine of up to £2,500, a Community Order, Parenting Order or ultimately, a Custodial Sentence). The legislation is the Education Act 1996 sec. 444(1) and 444(1A).
- 8.2 The County Attendance Team, with the school, will encourage you to engage with an Early Help Assessment. Education Supervision Orders may be discussed with you to support rapidly improved attendance.
- 8.3 Parents that have previously been issued with Penalty Notices for their children's unauthorised absences, in the event of further unauthorised absences may receive summonses to Court.
- 8.4 Alternatively, parents or children may wish to contact the County Attendance Team themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. Their telephone number is 01865 323513  
[attendance@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:attendance@oxfordshire.gov.uk)
- 8.5 After that time, they will receive a mark that shows them to be on site, but this will not count as a present mark, and it will mean they have an unauthorised absence. This may mean that you could face the possibility of a Penalty Notice if the problem persists.
- 8.6 Whilst there is no mandatory time for pm registration, the school will seek to take the register directly following the lunchtime period at 13.15 pm in order to support safeguarding and early identification of pupils who are Late to return, or who do not return.

## 9 Exceptional Leave

- 9.1 Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking children away in school time. Remember that any savings you think you may make by taking a holiday in school time are offset by the cost to your child's education.
- 9.2 Parents/carers can request exceptional leave using the form in appendix 1
- 9.3 There is no automatic entitlement in law to time off in school time to go on holiday.
1. It is widely known that the link between a pupil's attendance and attainment is irrefutable.
  2. Early poor attendance habits follow through into secondary school, further education, and employment.
  3. Graduates earn, on average, double that of young people that leave school with no qualifications.
  4. All schools in Oxfordshire are encouraged to adopt a policy of not authorising Exceptional Leave.
  5. The Head Teacher will meet personally with every family applying for Exceptional Leave to stress the importance of good school attendance habits and links between attendance & attainment.
  6. Exceptional leave is most unlikely to be authorised when a pupil's attendance is less than 95%.
  7. Exceptional leave should always be refused when school is aware of any truancy.
  8. Exceptional leave should always be refused when requests are regular (annual) or when patterns become identifiable.
  9. Reasons for Exceptional Leave should be logged on the pupil's record and shared as part of the transfer/transition process.
- 9.4 The County Attendance Team can issue Penalty Notices for any unauthorised 'Exceptional Leave'. Penalty Notices can be issued to each parent/carer concerned. Please note that it will be per parent per child. Payment within 21 days of receipt of notice is £60 and £120 if paid after this period but within 28 days. If the Penalty Notice remains unpaid after 28 days, you will each receive a summons to Oxford Magistrates Court. If unauthorised leave is repeated the County Attendance Team may summons each parent to Court without a Penalty Notice being issued.

## 10 School targets, projects, and special initiatives

- 10.1 The school has targets to improve attendance and your child has an important part to play in meeting these targets. Targets for the school and for classes are displayed in the school and you should take time to study them.

- 10.2 The minimum level of attendance for this school is 96% attendance and we will keep you updated regularly about progress to this level and how your child's attendance compares. This can also be obtained through My Child at School.
- 10.3 Our target is to achieve better than this however because we know that good attendance is the key to successful schooling, and we believe our pupils can be amongst the best in Oxfordshire.
- 10.4 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 our school newsletter and we ask for your full support. We analyse all absence carefully and draw trends based on pupils' characteristics, vulnerabilities, days of the week, subjects missed and repeat illnesses. We focus our attention on addressing these trends of absence.
- 10.5 Our staff with responsibility for attendance
- *Mrs Tracey Silk – School Pastoral Support Lead*
  - *Mr Tim Coates - SENCo*
  - *Mrs Rachel Salmons - Headteacher*
  - *Mr Keith Settle – Joint Chair of Governors*

## **11 Dissemination**

- 11.1 The Policy is available on the school web site and a paper copy is available from the school admin office on request.

## **12 Reviewing the Policy**

- 12.1 This policy will be reviewed annually by the Headteacher and monitored by the Link Governor who will ensure that the Policy is relevant and up to date.



## 13 Appendix 1 Request for exception leave



### Sonning Common Primary School

Grove Road, Sonning Common, Reading, RG4 9RJ  
office@sonning-common.oxon.sch.uk  
0118 972 2105

Headteacher: Mrs R Salmons

#### Application for Leave of Absence from school during term time

Dear Applicant,

All schools by law must follow the Department for Education's statutory guidance relating to school attendance. They must use the appropriate national attendance or absence code, and follow the criteria set out within the guidance. The statutory guidance states:

- A leave of absence must not be granted unless there are exceptional circumstances and must be requested in advance
- A leave of absence must be requested in advance by a parent who the pupil normally lives with
- Schools must judge each application individually, considering the specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind each request
- Where a leave of absence is granted, the school will determine the number of days a pupil can be absent from school
- A need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation would not constitute an exceptional circumstance
- A school cannot grant a leave of absence retrospectively. If the parent did not apply in advance, the leave of absence should not be granted
- Where this guidance refers to a parent, the school and/or local authority will need to decide which adult(s) is most appropriate. Generally, parents include:
  - All natural parents, whether they are married or not;
  - All those who have parental responsibility
  - Those who have day to day responsibility for the child

Please note all schools are expected to regularly inform parents about their child's attendance and absence.

Taking your child out of school during term time could be detrimental to their educational progress. If the absence is not authorised and the leave is taken, schools may refer to the Local Authority for legal action. Please find attached information regarding Penalty Notice Fines for School Attendance.

Rachel Salmons  
Headteacher

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**Helping Parents understand Penalty Notice Fines for School Attendance**  
From 19 August 2024, there is a National Framework for Penalty Notice Fines  
being issued for unauthorised absences recorded by schools

<b>National Threshold</b>
A single consistent national threshold for when a Penalty Notice must be considered by ALL schools in England, this is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10 sessions (usually equivalent to 5 school days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period</li><li>• These sessions do not have to be consecutive and can be made up of a combination of any type of unauthorised absence</li><li>• <u>For example</u>, a 5-day unauthorised leave of absence would meet the national threshold</li><li>• The 10-school week period can span different terms or school years</li></ul>
<b>Who may be fined?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Penalty Notice Fines are issued to each parent who allows their child to be absent without authorisation from school</li><li>• <u>For example</u>, 3 siblings absent for unauthorised leave during term-time would result in each parent receiving 3 separate fines</li></ul>
<b>First Offence</b>
The first time a Penalty Notice is issued for unauthorised absence, the fine amount will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• £80 per parent, per child if paid <b>within 21 days</b></li><li>• If not paid <b>within 21 days</b>, the fine will increase to <b>£160 per parent, per child</b>, payable between the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> day</li></ul>
<b>Second Offence (within 3 years)</b>
The second time a Penalty Notice is issued for unauthorised absence, a reduced rate is not available. The amount therefore will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>£160 per parent, per child – payable within 28 days</b></li></ul>
<b>Third Offence and Any Further Offences (within 3 years)</b>
The third time an offence is committed, a Penalty Notice WILL NOT be issued, and the case will be presented <b>straight to the Magistrate's Court</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prosecution can result in <b>criminal records</b> and <b>fines of up to £2,500</b></li><li>• Cases found <b>guilty</b> in a Magistrates Court can show on the parent's future DBS certificate (Disclosure and Barring Service) due to a <b>'failure to safeguard a child's education'</b></li></ul>



**Application for Leave of Absence from School during term time**

Dear Headteacher,

I would like to request permission for leave of absence for my child, a pupil registered at your school, for the reasons detailed below (*further information can be attached if required*).

Pupil's full name	
Pupil's Date of Birth	
Year Group and Class name	
Pupil's full address and postcode	

First date of absence	
Last date of absence	
Date of return to school	
Number of school days absent	

**Please be aware**, as per our school's attendance policy and the Oxfordshire's published Code of Conduct relating to school attendance, that the law requires parents to seek permission from the head teacher to take their child out of school during term time. The law states permission can only be granted if:

1. An application has been made in advance by the parent the child normally lives with; **and**
2. There are exceptional circumstances.

Please also note that, if on the rare occasion circumstances are deemed exceptional by the headteacher, the duration your child is permitted to be away from school may only be determined by the headteacher.

<b>Reason for request including why you believe your circumstances to be exceptional</b> (Further details may be attached to this form)

<b>If you have a child/ren at another school/s, please detail their name/s and which school/s they attend below</b>
Pupil's name, name of school and school telephone number:

Full name of person making request (requests must be made by a parent who the pupil normally lives with)	
Relationship to child	
Full address and postcode (if different from child's above)	
Signature	
Date	

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**Application for Leave of Absence from School during term time School Response**

**School to complete the below, keeping the originals, returning copies of all pages together with the appropriate letter to all parents**

Dear	
Copy sent to (other parent)	

Date application received by school	
Date of response from school	

Pupil's full name	
Pupil's Date of Birth	
Year Group and Class	
Pupil's full address and postcode	
Pupil's percentage attendance year to date	
Number of sessions absent this academic year (total)	
Number of which are authorised absences	
Number of which are unauthorised absences	

Has this pupil had any previously recorded unauthorised leave of absence?	
Was a Penalty Notice Fine requested as a result?	
Are you aware of <b>any</b> Penalty Notice Fines that the parent or parents may have previously received for this pupil and/or a sibling/child for whom they hold parental/day to day care and responsibility?	

School response to parent/s request for leave of absence

Number of requested sessions authorised	
Number of requested sessions unauthorised	
Date pupil required to return to school	

Headteacher Signature	
Headteacher Name	
Date	