



# **WESTFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY**

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

**Date ratified: April 2019**

**Ratified by: Full Governing Body**

**Date to be reviewed: April 2020**



## WESTFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL & NURSERY ATTENDANCE POLICY

April 2019

At Westfield Primary School & Nursery, we want the whole school community – governors, staff, parents and pupils to be committed to high standards of attendance and punctuality.

Good attendance helps the children in this school community to maximise their learning. This policy will support us all to achieve high levels of attendance and punctuality.

Westfield Primary School & Nursery aims to encourage and assist all pupils to achieve excellent levels of attendance and punctuality to ensure all pupils take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them.

It is the legal responsibility of parents to ensure their child is at school.

*Section 7 of Education Act 1996 states:*

*Duty of parents to secure education of children of compulsory school age.*

*The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient full-time education suitable-*

- (a) to his/her age, ability and aptitude, and
- (b) to any special educational needs he/she may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

### **Aims**

At Westfield Primary School & Nursery we aim for our pupils to attain the highest levels of achievement and to foster their development so that they benefit fully from the opportunities and responsibilities presented to them. As part of this we consider excellent attendance at school to be vital. Schools are open for 190 days each year and all of our pupils have the right to these 190 days of learning, teaching and school experience.

It follows, therefore, that all children should be at school, on time, every day that the school is open, unless the reason for absence is unavoidable

### **Monitoring**

Although the school is no longer required to set targets for overall attendance and persistent absence, we believe that unnecessary absence or lateness is a barrier to learning and progress. As a result, the school will continue to set internal targets for attendance and punctuality and monitor, on a regular basis, the attendance and punctuality of pupils in order to take action where there are concerns.

## **Expectations**

The responsibility for good attendance is shared between the school, parents/carers and pupils. All these groups need to understand the expectations which this policy makes of them.

### **The Role of the School**

The school will provide a safe learning environment in which all pupils can thrive and succeed. In order to ensure pupils make the progress of which they are capable, we will:

- ensure pupils are able to attend school for 380 sessions each year, i.e. 190 days;
- ensure that accurate records of attendance and punctuality are maintained according to Government legislation and guidance, on a daily basis;
- clearly distinguish between absences which are authorised and those which are unauthorised (it is the decision of the Headteacher as to whether or not an absence will be authorised);
- encourage good attendance and punctuality and ensure school staff set good examples in this regard;
- investigate all unexplained or unjustified absences and follow up poor attendance and punctuality;
- keep parents informed of their child's attendance/punctuality record and work with parents should either give cause for concern;
- monitor attendance and punctuality levels monthly and report to Governors;
- liaise regularly with the Local Authority appointed Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO) over attendance and punctuality issues relating to individual pupils.

### **The Role of Parents/Carers**

Parents have a legal duty under the Education Act 1996 for ensuring their child's attendance and punctuality at school. They are also responsible for ensuring that their children stay at school once they have registered. Consequently they should:

- ensure their child attends school regularly and on time;
- ensure their child is properly dressed and equipped and in a fit condition to learn;
- avoid arranging family holidays in term time;
- avoid arranging non-urgent medical appointments during school hours/term time.
- inform the school by 8:30am on the first day of absence and communicate the reason for their child's absence by telephone/letter/email or in person;
- confirm, in writing, the reason for their child's absence, when they return;
- maintain regular communication with school staff about any concerns/issues;
- ensure the school office is notified immediately of any change to contact details;
- Pupils to be signed in and/or out at the school office, when they arrive late, leave for / return from medical appointments

- take an active interest in their child's school life and work.

It is accepted that young pupils tend to be accountable to their parents and do not usually truant from school. However, all children are occasionally reluctant to attend school and disaffected pupils may exhibit symptoms of illness, whether real or imagined, and be allowed to remain at home. Pupils who experience difficulties need support and understanding. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents/carers and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend it is never better to 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 makes things worse.

## **The Role of Pupils**

### **All pupils are expected to:**

- attend school daily and punctually
- Are expected to be ready to learn
- Pupils to be signed in and/or out at the school office, when they arrive late, leave for / return from medical appointments

### **The Role of the Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO)**

The AIO regularly visits the school to meet with the Office Manager and/or Headteacher. The purpose of the visits is to identify pupils who are experiencing attendance difficulties and agree on focused, time-limited action which needs to be taken by the school and/or AIO.

### **Doors Open**

Parents/carers are asked to have pupils at the 'Meeting Place' by 8.40am, when a bell will be rung, ready to enter the classrooms at 8.45am. The school gates will be locked at 9am. However, Year 5 & 6 pupils can arrive at the meeting place from 8.30am onwards. They should not arrive before 8.30am except by prior agreement, e.g. an organised club or visit departing from the school prior to normal start of school.

### **Registration**

Registration will take place at the start of each morning and afternoon session. This means the registers are taken at 8.50am in the mornings and at 1.05pm in the afternoons.

A pupil will be recorded as late, with a code of 'L', if they arrive after 8.45am and via the office because the rest of their class has already gone into school. Parents of children arriving late at school complete a 'Late' form giving an explanation.

Registers remain open until 8.55am for Reception to Year 6. The register for Nursery remains open, but parents are encouraged to help their children develop good habits by ensuring their children attend daily and punctually.

At registration pupils should be called by name and respond in the prescribed manner – Good morning/afternoon - established by the class teacher.

Registers will be marked in accordance with DfE guidance.

Registers are completed electronically at designated times during the school day (a.m. and p.m) in the classroom via SIMs. Reasons for absence are recorded in a Message Diary in the office and on SIMS.

In the case of fire or evacuation, the office staff will bring out a print out of the registers and the signing in/out sheets for pupils, staff and visitors.

A print out of the school register is printed monthly and retained in a secure file for a period of not less than 3 years.

### **Following up Lateness**

Parents whose children are regularly late for school, will be contacted by a member of school staff who will work with the parent(s) to bring about an improvement in punctuality.

### **Authorised and Unauthorised Absence**

Every half-day absence (known as a session) from school has to be classified by the school (not by the parents), as either **Authorised** or **Unauthorised**. This is why information about the reason for each absence is always required, in writing.

An absence from school is an authorised one if:

- The pupil was absent with permission from the Headteacher
- The pupil was unwell, or prevented from attending by an unavoidable cause
- Medical appointments which are unavoidable
- The absence occurred on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the child's parents belong
- Weddings – immediate family members (one day maximum)
- There is a family bereavement
- The pupil is involved in an exceptional special occasion
- The pupil is taking part in a performance within the meaning of s37 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1963 (c) for which a child performance licence has been issued.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no "leave" has been granted. This includes:

- No explanation for absence has been forthcoming
- The school is dissatisfied with the explanation
- The pupil stays at home to help look after parents or younger siblings (other than in exceptional circumstances)
- The pupil is away from school on a family holiday/day trip without an authorisation from the school
- Any pupil arriving too late to be entered into the Register
- Birthdays

### **Persistent Absenteeism (PA)**

A pupil becomes a persistent absentee' when their attendance rate falls below 90% at any time of the school year, **for whatever reason**. Absenteeism of this level will considerably

damage a pupil's educational prospects and the parents'/carers' fullest support and co-operation will be needed to tackle this.

All absence is monitored thoroughly. Any case that is seen to have reached the PA level or is at risk of moving towards that level is given priority and the parents/carers of those pupils will be informed of this promptly.

PA pupils are tracked and monitored carefully by the school's Attendance Officer and Headteacher. Parents/carers may need to come into school and meet with the Headteacher (and possibly the LA AIO) to discuss their child's attendance and the progress being made.

All attendance actions, reviews and comments for pupils deemed as a 'persistent absentee' will be documented using the Child Protection Online Management system (CPOMS).

### **When Problems Arise & Penalty Notices**

Parents/carers are expected to contact the school at an early stage and work with 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 AIO. The AIO will also try to resolve the situation by agreement but parents/carers who fail to respond to requests by the school to send their children to school or who take unauthorised holidays during term time may be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice by the Local Education Authority.

The Notices will be issued at the discretion of the Headteacher and will be applied to parents/carers whose child has at least 15 sessions of unauthorised absence in the previous and/or current term. The fines will apply to cases where the parent/carer is able but unwilling to ensure the attendance of the pupil. The penalty is £60 per parent/carer if paid within 21 days of receipt of notice, and rises to £120 which must be paid within 28 days. If the penalty is not paid, the Local Authority may subsequently prosecute the parents/carers for their child's irregular attendance. Fixed Penalty Notices will operate following the Hertfordshire County Council Code of Conduct and Guidance for Schools, dated February 2016.

Parents, carers or children may wish to contact the AIO themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. The telephone number is available from the school office or by contacting the Local Authority.

The school puts a lot of effort into re-integrating pupils who have had extended absence, for whatever reason, and will work closely with the parents/carers to provide support.

Parents whose first language is not English, or who have literacy difficulties, will be offered appropriate support in matters of school communication.

### **Procedures**

The school applies the following procedures in deciding how to deal with individual absences or lateness:-

- Parents/carers are asked to inform the school on a daily basis by 8.30am either by letter, phone, email or in person if their child will be absent. Absences for illness and medical/dental appointments will be authorised. **Wherever possible medical appointments should be made to take place outside of school hours.**
- If a teacher has concerns about an absence or a pupil is absent and no communication has been received, then the school will attempt to contact the parents/carers. A text message will be sent by the school requesting a call to advise the reason for absence.

- **When a pupil returns to school after an absence of 2 or more days, they should bring a letter from the parent/carer explaining the reason for absence. The absence will not be authorised until this note of explanation is received and even then the authorisation is at the discretion of the Headteacher.** Notes from parents are kept in the office. Telephone messages regarding lateness and absence are recorded in the daily diary and on SIMS (Management Information System).
- Pupils requiring Leave of Absence to take part in examinations, eg music, ballet, etc, or other legitimate educational activities will generally have absence authorised.
- Pupils' attendance figures, including unauthorised absences, will be recorded on their Annual Report.
- Whilst a pupil may be off school because they are ill, where attendance levels of a pupil fall to an unacceptable level, parents/carers may be asked to provide medical evidence to support their child's absences.

## **Family Holidays and Other Absences**

**Absences in order to take family holidays and outings will not be authorised except in very exceptional circumstances.** The Governors, in conjunction with those from the other Berkhamsted schools, have agreed the following **may**, in some cases, be viewed as "exceptional circumstances":

- Family/carer funeral or trauma
- Weddings (immediate family only – 1 day maximum)
- Religious festivals
- Visiting new schools prior to relocation

A request must be made **at least 3 weeks** before departure (except in the case of funerals when this time constraint does not apply) by completion of a "Leave of Absence" form obtainable from the school office. The parents/carers may be invited to attend a meeting with the Headteacher to discuss the request. All other absences will be recorded as unauthorised unless special permission has been granted by the Headteacher. Should the child remain absent beyond the time granted, any further absence will be recorded as "Unauthorised".

All schools are required to notify the Local Authority of any pupil of compulsory school age who fails to attend school regularly, or who has been absent for a continuous period of more than 10 school days, without a legitimate reason.

## **Part-time timetables**

It is recognised that there may be occasions when a child is unable to attend school full-time, due to, for example, recovery from illness or exceptional family circumstances. Also, there may be instances when a child is experiencing severe behavioural difficulties at school and is finding it increasingly difficult to cope with full-time attendance. In such circumstances the law permits the temporary use of a part-time/reduced timetable.

*In very exceptional circumstances there may be a need for a temporary part-time timetable to meet a pupil's individual needs. For example where a medical condition prevents a pupil from attending full-time education and a part-time timetable is considered as part of a re-integration package. A part-time timetable must not be treated as a long-term solution. Any pastoral support programme or other agreement must have a time limit by which point the pupil is expected to attend full-time or be provided with alternative provision. In agreeing to a part-time timetable, a school has agreed to a pupil being absent from school for part of the week or day and therefore must record it as authorised absence.*

- A part-time timetable must not be treated as a long-term plan. The arrangement should always specify an end-date by when it is expected that the child will return to full-time education (or when an alternative will be provided) and be reviewed regularly in the light of any changes to the child's circumstances.
- A temporary part-time timetable should provide a means of achieving re-integration to full-time education. It should never be used as a form of exclusion from school for part of the school day or as permanent provision.
- The local authority will be informed of any instance of a child being placed on a part-time timetable, so that the local authority is aware of the arrangement.
- Governors will be informed about any children placed on part-time timetables, so that governors can fulfil their responsibilities to monitor the school's provision.

If the school considers that full-time education would not be in the best interests of a child's physical or mental health, and is considering placing him/her on a temporary part-time timetable, it will:

1. Consult with relevant agencies to determine the education and support provision that would best meet the child's individual needs, for a fixed term.
2. Complete an action plan which shows a clear path to planned reintegration from part-time provision to full-time attendance, with a date for review. Where appropriate, the child should be actively involved in this planning. The plan should be reviewed if there is a change to his/her circumstances or needs.
3. If the child has a Statement of SEN, or an Education, Health and Care Plan, consult with the local authority's SEND team to ensure that the Statement/EHCP is implemented fully under a reduced timetable. The school will also consider whether it is appropriate to arrange an interim statement review, if for example the child's needs have changed and it is considered that this could impact on the ability for the provision to meet his/her needs.
4. Confirm, in writing, which adults will be responsible for the duty of care for the child during school sessions when he/she is not attending: (schools retain full duty of care for all children who are on the school roll if they are receiving education off-site).
5. Obtain written consent to the arrangements from the child's parents/carers. Should parents/carers not agree to the part-time timetable, it cannot be implemented, as without parental agreement a part-time timetable would be considered to be an unlawful exclusion.
6. Keep a central record of the arrangement and reviews and notify the local authority, using the form provided for this purpose.



7. Record the child's absence from school for sessions when he/she is not in attendance as authorised absence (register code C).
8. Inform the local authority when the child returns to full-time education.

### **The Use of Legal Action**

If a pupil fails to attend school regularly without a legitimate reason and attempts by the school and the AIO fail to secure that pupil's return to regular attendance, the County Council will take legal action.

A complaint may be made against the parents/carers, in the Magistrates' Court (under section 444 of the Students Act 1996), or an educational supervision order relating to the pupil under section 36 of the Education Act 1989 will be applied for. Any exceptional mitigating circumstances are taken into account, when considering legal action.

### **Strategies for Promoting Attendance**

Westfield Primary School & Nursery offers an environment in which pupils feel valued and welcomed. The school's ethos must demonstrate that pupils feel that their presence in school is important, that they will be missed when they are absent or late, and that follow-up action will be taken.

Attendance registers are monitored every month and analysed in order to identify attendance patterns of individual pupils, correlate attendance and standards of achievement, and inform policy and practice. Attendance information is reported to Governors on a termly basis.

Parents are regularly reminded via newsletters, prospectus, etc, of the importance of good attendance. School holiday dates are published well in advance and as soon as they are known in order to assist parents in booking family holidays outside of term times.

Pupils who are absent for an extended period of authorised absence will, where appropriate, have work sent home to them, and will be supported in school on their return.

The school in conjunction with the Local Authority issues special certificates to pupils who achieve 100% attendance and above 97% attendance over the school year. These certificates are awarded at the end of summer term Awards assembly.

### **Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's policy cycle or following an agreed change to practice. This will be done by the Headteacher in consultation with Staff and Governors.

