

Attendance and Punctuality Policy

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Rationale

To ensure through robust systems and procedures, attendance and punctuality are a priority of all those associated with the school including, pupils, parents/carers, teachers and the local academy committee. This ensures excellent levels of attendance for all pupils to enable fulfilment of their potential and to keep them safe.

To encourage maximum attendance levels, both staff and pupils will work within a framework of good practice that both supports and motivates pupils and is consistent across the school.

It is important that each pupil attends school regularly and on time. Parents/carers have a vital role to play in order to support and encourage good attendance & punctuality, fulfilling their legal responsibility. Parents/carers must work in partnership with the school to ensure pupils have access to a full education.

Key Principles

- High levels of attendance and punctuality are promoted, and expectations are clear
- Where attendance or punctuality fall short of expected national standards, steps will be taken to address this through a whole school approach.
- Some pupils find it harder than others to attend school regularly. The school will work with pupils and families to remove any barriers to attendance.
- Pupils are taught the importance of regular school attendance and how these impacts on their learning

Encouraging good attendance and punctuality

At Birchfield School, we want to create a culture that encourages pupils and their families to understand the importance of good attendance and punctuality. We encourage open communication between home and school and use a range of strategies and external agencies to provide early help.

We know that an early response to emerging concerns is most effective. The circumstances of the individual pupil or group of pupils must determine the nature of the strategies put in place.

Statutory Requirements

- Regular attendance at school is an important legal responsibility which is shared amongst schools, parents/carers and the LA. This is further emphasised by the Pupils Act 1989 which highlights the need for schools to work in partnership with parents and the support services of the LA to promote and maintain the regular attendance of all pupils.
- New 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' guidance (September 2023) gives even tighter guidance regarding pupils who are missing from education and refers to the Pupils Missing from Education Guidance 2022:
- This includes pupils, where the school has not been informed of their whereabouts and it is ongoing or a regular occurrence. It states:

If a child is absent from school and their whereabouts is unknown, schools have a duty to carry out a reasonable enquiry jointly with the local authority to ascertain their whereabouts.

Keeping Pupils Safe in Education, September 2023, also refers to Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities (February 2024).

This guidance summarises the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance and explains how they apply to local authorities, heads, school staff, governing bodies, pupils, and parents/carers. These requirements are contained in:

- The Education (Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils) (England) Regulations 2007
- Section 10 of the Pupils Act 2004
- Section 437(1) of the Education Act 1996
- Section 437(3) of the Education Act 1996
- Section 443 of the Education Act 1996
- Prosecution under section 444 of the Education Act 1996 and penalty notices under section 444A (as amended by section 23 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003)
- Section 447 of the Education Act 1996
- Section 47 of the Pupils Act 1989
- Section 7 of the Education Act 1996

Pupil Registration:

The school maintains an attendance register and uses this to record each pupil's attendance at the start of the school day and again in the afternoon. All pupils are required to be on time for school and will be registered in line with the registration times set out by the school.

Parents, schools and the LA's share legal responsibilities in respect of school attendance:

- Parents/carers of pupils of compulsory school age must ensure that they receive an efficient and suitable full-time education (Section 7 Education Act 1996)
- All schools must keep an attendance register on which, at the beginning of each morning and during the afternoon session, a pupil should be marked present or absent. (Pupils, Registration Regulations 1995)
- LAs must ensure that parents are fulfilling their statutory obligations as to their pupils' education including, where necessary, by action through the Courts. (Sections 437- 448 Education Act 1996)
- Schools should ensure that registers are properly kept (Pupils' Registration Regulations 1995)
- Schools are required to collect and publish data on their rates of all absences for the preceding year. "All schools must distinguish in their attendance registers between authorised and unauthorised absences of pupils of compulsory school age; school prospectuses and annual reports must include specified information on rates of unauthorised absence." (The Pupils' Registration Regulations, the Education (School Information) Regulations 1981) (The Education (school Curriculum and Related Information) Regulations 1989)
- Staff can find more information on pupil registration within the staff journal

Authorised and Unauthorised Absences

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school, (not by the parents/carers), as either **authorised** or **unauthorised**. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a valid reason, such as illness or other unavoidable cause.

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

- Parents keeping children off school unnecessarily (i.e. birthday treat, shopping trip etc.)
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Absences where the school is not satisfied with the reasons given
- Children who arrive at school late, 30 minutes after the register opens, without good cause.
- Holidays or extended leave in term time (please see guidance below)

Exceptional circumstances are at the Head's discretion, or the deputy headteacher in the absence of the Head.

Illness and Medical Appointments

When a child is unwell, parents/carers should contact the school before 9am on the first day of absence.

As part of schools safeguarding procedures, school will endeavour to contact the parent/carer if no message has been received regarding the reason for the absence. If school are unable to make contact within 3 days, a home visit will be carried out by 2 members of staff. For pupils/families identified as vulnerable, this may be done on the first day of absence. If there is still no contact with the parent/carer, and school have not been able to establish the safety of the pupil, a decision will be made about the next course of action; this may involve contacting the police or children's services. If a child is ill for more than 4 days where school has been notified of the absence the school may conduct a safe and well check

- Every effort should be made to arrange medical appointments outside of school hours. When this is not possible, an appointment letter is required and pupils should be returned to the school directly after the appointment, dependent on the circumstances.
- If a pupil is absent due to a virus causing vomiting, they should not return to school for the next 48hrs after the last bout of sickness.

Term time leave policy

At Birchfield School we follow local authority (LA) guidelines. Pupils only attend school for 195 days out of 365. This leaves 170 days for holidays. We encourage parents to take their holidays during these 170 days. Therefore, we do not authorise term time holidays or extended leave. This is due to the significant negative effect these have on a child's progress. However, we recognise that occasionally, there may be exceptional circumstances which will be looked at on an individual basis and a decision made by the Head. Where permission is granted the Head will confirm the number of days and dates of absence which are authorised. This will be confirmed in writing. If permission is not granted and the parent/carer proceeds to take their child out of school, the absence will be marked as unauthorised and parents/carers may be issued with a penalty notice or be subject to prosecution by the local authority, in accordance with their criteria.

In some circumstances, if a pupil does not return to school in the timescale originally given by parents/carers, or there has been no return date given, a letter will be sent advising a date that we expect them to return by. If the pupil does not arrive back on this date, and we have had no contact from parents, a referral will be made to the Local Authority Child Missing in Education Team.

For concerns related to female genital mutilation (FGM) please refer to the school safeguarding policy and procedures.

Punctuality

If pupils arrive at school after the opening of the register, the lateness will be recorded. An unauthorised absence will be given to children arriving 30 minutes or more after the register is opened unless there is an evidenced medical appointment or an exceptional circumstance through the Head's discretion, that may require a more suitable authorised mark.

Addressing poor attendance and punctuality

The school will use data to target attendance improvement efforts to the pupil/pupils or groups of pupils that need it most.

We will:

- Offer a clear vision for attendance and improvement.
- Monitor and analyse weekly attendance patterns, proactively using data to identify pupils at risk of poor attendance.
- Provide regular attendance reports to class teachers and relevant leaders.
- Identify pupils who need support from wider partners and deliver this support through early help.
- Benchmark school attendance data against local, regional and national level.
- Monitor the impact of school strategies and actions to improve attendance against targeted groups or individual pupils.
- Hold regular meetings with parents/carers of pupils who the school consider to be vulnerable
- Write individual attendance action plans for identified, at risk, vulnerable pupils.
- Implement home-school contracts for identified poor attenders to encourage a collaborative approach to improving attendance.

Absence will be classed as persistent where it falls below 90% across the academic year. School has in place the Fast-track process which fines parents/carers for persistent unauthorised absence. Each parent or person with parental responsibility may receive a Penalty Notice for each child. (A copy of this information can be found on the school's website). If there is still no improvement, a referral may be made to Children's Services on the grounds of neglect. In some circumstances, if a pupil does not attend school for a period of time, and after checks, school are unable to locate where they are, they will make a referral to the Children Missing in Education Team as stated in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'.

Parental Responsibility

Parents/carers have a legal duty to ensure their child attends school regularly and arrives on time. We maintain close, effective and positive links with parents.

Parents/carers are expected to support the school by:

- Following the correct procedure for reporting the absence of their child
- Avoid unnecessary absences, including taking holidays outside of term time.
- Keep the school informed of any concerns or difficulties that may affect their child's attendance or punctuality.
- Promoting the importance of regular attendance with their child
- Informing school, in advance, of any proposed change of address for their child/ren along with the name of the parent with whom the child shall live.
- Ensuring pupils are collected on time at the end of the school day. If school can't contact parents/carers after 1 hour, a decision will be made in the best interest of the child. This may include contacting Children's Services.

Religious Observance

We recognise that pupils of certain faiths may need to participate in a day of religious observance. Where a day of religious observance falls during school time and has been exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil belongs the absence will be authorised.

This means that the religious body to which the pupils belongs sets the day as a religious festival then the school must authorise the absence. Where necessary, school will seek advice from the religious body about whether it has set the day apart for religious observance.

Role of pupils

- Attend school regularly and be on time.
- Follow the correct procedure if they arrive late.
- Take responsibility for maintaining their attendance, as appropriate.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The school will:

- Inform all relevant parties of strategies used to maintain and improve attendance & punctuality.
- Provide information in relation to attendance matters for the Local Academy Committee (LAC), The Trust Board, parents/carers, DFE, LA and School Admissions (Fair Access and Attendance Service).
- Regularly analyse attendance and punctuality data
- Monitor the effectiveness of long and short-term interventions.
- Present attendance figures on a regular basis to the LAC and Trustees

The Local Academy Committee/Trust board will:

- Take an active role in attendance improvement, recognise the importance of school attendance and promote it across the school's ethos and policies.
- Ensure the school's leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties.
- Regularly review attendance data, discuss and challenge trends and help school leaders focus improvement efforts on the individual pupils or cohorts who need it most.
- Ensure school staff receive adequate training on attendance, including dedicated training for staff with specific attendance responsibilities and any additional training that would help support pupils or cohorts overcome common barriers to attendance.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, or more regularly in the light of any statutory updates or in response to changes in guidance.