



BLETCHINGLEY VILLAGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Aiming high • Working together • Achieving our best

Attendance and Punctuality Policy

Rationale:

All children have a moral and legal right to the best possible education, and this means attending school on time every day unless they are too unwell or there are exceptional circumstances for absence.

Good attendance is a shared responsibility between home and school.

The law delegates the authorising of absence to the head teacher of the school but sets strict guidance about whether absence should or should not be authorised. The school follows this guidance and completes attendance registers using the codes set by the DfE.

Aims:

To raise attendance and improve punctuality for the school, for groups and for individual children in order to raise standards of achievement.

Absence from school

Children's absences are classified as authorised or unauthorised. The DfE expects most children's attendance to be 95% or better. This allows for unavoidable absences through illness etc of up to ten days per academic year. This means that children who are taken out of school for holidays are very unlikely to achieve attendance at the expected level.

School attendance is monitored by the Local Authority, and nationally. Our attendance is improving over time, and the number of children identified as having "persistent absence" is reducing, but our target is to improve further and achieve above-average attendance.

Persistent Absence

The threshold for persistent absence has been lowered year on year as attendance has improved. It is now classified as attendance below 90%.

Authorised absences may include:

Sickness; dentist, hospital and clinic appointments; religious holidays; special family events which cannot be held during school holidays; family funerals. If children are away from school with illness, we need to have details of what the illness is and we may ask for further medical evidence. We cannot authorise sickness absence if there is any doubt – e.g. the child talks about having gone on holiday whilst on sickness absence, or has been seen out playing or out shopping. In such cases, the absence would be recorded as unauthorised.

Unauthorised absences include:

Shopping, visiting relatives, going for a haircut, parent/s unwell, birthday treats, excessive lateness, excessive time taken for medical appointments; minor ailments; car breaking down.

Holidays and special events

Missing school always has an impact as the time can never be made up, and so children should only be taken out of school in exceptional circumstances. In September 2013, the government updated its guidance to schools and removed any reference to term-time holiday. It stated that a request for term-time leave **should only be granted where there are exceptional reasons**. Bletchingley Village Primary School's interpretation of this guidance is in line with the majority of Tandridge schools and with new advice from the NAHT, supported by the government. Therefore, we do not authorise any leave for term-time holidays taken for reasons of price or availability, but we may grant leave for special events which cannot be held during school holidays, or for significant family occasions such as weddings or funerals. However, the head teacher has to decide the length that the absence can be, and can only authorise leave for the event itself; not for extended time. Unfortunately, if parents decide to extend the event into a holiday, the head teacher is now not allowed to authorise any of the absence, and a Code G would have to be used.

The head teacher and governors are always willing to support parents where it is made difficult for them to take their annual leave during school holidays, for example, by writing to the employer.

All requests for exceptional leave of absence must be made in writing to the head teacher, and permission will only be granted if the following criteria are met: -

- There is no concern about the pupil's attendance record
- The leave is for an exceptional reason, and the head teacher and governors feel that the social and/or educational benefits to the child outweigh the impact of the absence from school
- Permission is requested and granted prior to any bookings being made.

Any leave that has not been authorised by the head will be classed as an unauthorised absence or unauthorised holiday, and the relevant code will appear on the child's attendance record (O or G). This may result in the parent/carer facing a penalty notice. (See below).

Other Planned Absences

Parents and carers are asked to contact the school by telephone, email or in person if their child needs to be absent for part of the school day. Medical appointments should be arranged if possible outside the school day. Where this is not possible it is expected that pupils only miss part of the day.

Where the child needs leave for a whole morning, afternoon or more, permission must be requested from the head teacher.

For medical appointments, we encourage parents to bring the child to school for registration and return them to school as quickly as possible so that they do not incur a whole session's absence.

Unplanned absences

- We ask that parents and carers notify the school by telephone as early as possible if a child is ill.
- We ask that parents and carers keep the school informed about the child's illness and phone the school each day, unless the length of absence is already known.
- If a child is absent and no telephone call is received, the school will contact the parents/carer both to establish the reason for absence and to ensure that the parent/carer is aware that the child is not at school.
- If there is no explanation, or an unsatisfactory reason, for absence, or the school is unable to make contact with the parent/carer, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised.

Lateness

Doors open at just after 8.45 in order to avoid congestion at the doors, and the school day starts officially at 8:55 am. The playground door is closed once all children have entered the school, although a senior member of staff remains on lookout for a few more minutes. Children arriving after this time have to enter through the front door and are recorded in the late book if it is after 9.00. Children arriving between 9.00 a.m. and 9.30 a.m. have a late mark entered on the register. By law, any child arriving more than thirty minutes after the register opens must be given U (unauthorised absence) for the morning session.

Poor attendance/punctuality

We try to address attendance issues informally and supportively in order to resolve them by working together. Our Welfare and Safeguarding Assistant is responsible for monitoring attendance, first-day calling, and for working with parents to address attendance issues. However, where this is not effective and a child's attendance and/or punctuality continue to cause concern, the school will make a referral to the Educational Welfare Officer, who may take legal action if he/she feels this is necessary. In addition, the EWO carries out regular register checks as part of his/her statutory duties, and will use these checks to identify pupils whose attendance is below acceptable levels.

Penalty Notices

The Education Welfare Service, acting on behalf of Surrey County Council may issue a Penalty Notice as an alternative to the prosecution of a parent/carer for their child's unauthorised absence from school or for persistent lateness, and requires the recipient to pay a fixed amount.

The amount payable on issue of a Penalty Notice is £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice, rising to £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days.

If the Penalty Notice is not paid within 28 days, the Local Authority must prosecute the parent/carer for failing to ensure regular school attendance under Section 444 Education Act 1996.

Circumstances when a Penalty Notices may be issued

- A Penalty Notice may be issued to parents/carers who are failing to secure their child's regular school attendance and are failing to engage with supportive measures to improve attendance proposed by the school or Education Welfare Officer.
- Where a child is taken out of school for a holiday during term time for 5 days or more without the authority of the head teacher, **each parent** is liable to receive a penalty notice for each child. In these circumstances, a warning will not be given where it can be shown that parents had previously been warned that such absences would not be authorised.
- Pupils identified by police and education welfare officers engaged on Truancy Patrols and who have incurred unauthorised absences.
- Late arrival after the close of registration, on 10 occasions, during a six week period. The lateness will be recorded in accordance with the Lateness section of this policy.

With the exception of unauthorised holidays taken in term time, parents will be sent a formal warning of their liability to receive such a notice before it is issued.

Monitoring and Evaluation.

The school will ensure that parents are aware of our attendance policy through the website, newsletters, the prospectus and induction meetings with parents. We use the following strategies to promote good attendance and punctuality: -

- Certificates each term and once a year for 100% attendance.
- Certificates for children who show improved or outstanding attendance rates.
- A special weekly award (the Emperor Penguin Award) for the class with the best attendance of the week.
- Head teacher monitors attendance regularly and ensures that effective action is taken where concerns are raised.
- Inclusion of attendance section in new parents' induction meetings, and presence of the Education Welfare Officer
- Our Welfare and Safeguarding Assistant monitors and records absence daily, and makes contact with parents/carers as appropriate.
- First-day calling when a child is absent. The absence-line procedure has been updated and parents are asked to leave the child's name and class. The Welfare and Safeguarding Assistant will then call back to discuss the reason for the absence.
- Children's attendance and punctuality are recorded on their annual report.
- Teachers have attendance figures prior to parent consultations, so that this can form part of the discussion about a child's progress.
- There are regular reviews of attendance registers with the Educational Welfare Officer and letters are sent to parents/carers whose children's attendance is causing concern, or a meeting with parents/carers may be arranged either with members of school staff, or with the Education Welfare Officer (Attendance Panels).
- There is liaison with and support for parents/carers who experience difficulties in ensuring their children attend school regularly e.g. school staff may offer to collect/drop off children; we may care for children at the end of the school day if a parent cannot be at school at 3.15 and would otherwise keep the child away from school.
- We set attendance targets annually with the LA and take appropriate action to ensure that they are met. Current targets are set at 95.8%.
- Governors monitor attendance and punctuality through the head teacher's report.
- Governors evaluate the impact of the policy through head teacher's reports. They review the policy annually and amend it as appropriate.