

St Stephen's C.E. Primary School Attendance Policy



**'To be the best we can be
-with God's help'**

Ratified by Governing Body: 19/7/23

Review Date: 19/7/24

Terms in *italics* are explained in a glossary at the end of this policy.

At St Stephen's our vision is 'to be the best we can be-with God's help!', for children to gain the most from their educational opportunities, they need to attend school regularly, be on time and be prepared with everything they need for the day. We believe that the most important factor in promoting good attendance is the development of positive attitudes towards learning, so we strive to make coming to school a happy and rewarding experience for all children. We will reward those children whose attendance is very good and make the best provision we can to improve attendance for all pupils.

Parental Responsibility:

Parents have a legal obligation to ensure their children receive a full-time education. They should ensure that children of compulsory school age are registered at school and attend regularly. Absence should only occur when a child is unfit to learn or has a day of religious observance.

Parents are informed of their responsibility to ensure that their child attends regularly in the school prospectus. Schools have a legal duty to record a child's attendance, reporting on both *authorised and unauthorised absences*. Punctuality is also a key requirement as lateness impacts on learning and social development, not only for the individual, but for the class as a whole.

Arrival and registration:

School side gates open at 8.40am to enable children to be in their classrooms and ready to start the day. (Main gates open at 8.30 for On Time for Toast!) The gates close at 8.45am, when the register is taken. (Registers are taken at the start of the morning and the start of the afternoon session which means that a day counts as 2 attendances.) Children who arrive after 8.55am will enter school through the office when they will be given a late mark. Children who arrive after 9.30am will be given an unauthorised absence mark.

It is essential that children arriving and leaving school with a parent / guardian outside the normal hours are signed in or out at the office. The signing in / out register in the office is used in the case of fire as an appendix to class registers. Registers are checked regularly by the Education Welfare Officer to ensure they are kept accurately by teachers and to assess the reasons and incidence of any absences. Safeguarding is paramount at St Stephen's, and we will use registers to facilitate where there may be issues outside of school and families may need support. It is our statutory duty to safeguard all our children and following up any attendance concerns falls within our safeguarding duty.

Arrangements for absence:

The Headteacher authorises absence; St Stephen's C.E. Primary School adheres to the DFE guidelines in authorising absence. Absence for any reason during term time is discouraged.

Absence known to be for the following reasons would be authorised:

- Illness – school does seek advice from the school health service re expected absence times and medical evidence may be required for persistent or extended absences.
- Religious observance
- Attendance at medical appointments which cannot be made outside school hours. Every effort should be made to arrange medical appointments outside school hours. If it is necessary for a child to be out of school for this reason, the child should be returned to school directly after the appointment. A note or copy of the appointment letter should be sent / shown to the school if a child has a medical appointment.
- Family bereavement and exceptional circumstances: Sudden, serious circumstances do occur, rarely, when it is impossible for a family to bring a child to school. It is essential that the school is informed by the parents of the circumstances so that the appropriate code can be written in the register.

Calls from parents regarding absence are logged. After registration, checks are made to ensure that all children are accounted for. Telephone calls are made to parents of children who are not in school to ensure that children are safe, this forms part of our Child Protection procedure. Depending on the child's attendance profile and/or the nature of the absence, a phone call may also be made to ascertain whether the child could be brought to school.

Rewards for good attendance:

The main benefit gained from regular attendance and good punctuality is that continuity and progression in learning are ensured. This is incentivised in several ways:

- The class with the best attendance and punctuality each week receives a certificate and trophy which is presented in Celebration Assembly. The class who achieves the best attendance, above the school's target of 97% attendance in the preceding week will earn the right to wear their own clothes to school the following Friday.
- All children who achieve 100% attendance in any one term will receive an excellence certificate for attendance awarded at the last assembly of the term. There are special awards for any child who has 100 per cent attendance for a whole year, including an afternoon trip.
- Where positive impact is required, all staff in contact with the child will take extra care to welcome the child each morning, praise punctual attendance and acknowledge the effort the child has made. It is also appropriate to recognise the effort the parent has made to secure the child's attendance.

Procedures that are followed if a child is absent:

- If a child is unable to attend school, parents should ring school by 9.30 am to inform school of the reason for absence.

- The class teacher will record the absence in the register, using an 'N' code. The Attendance Officer/School Secretary will endeavour to contact the parent or guardian.
- Causing Concern Letters - If a child's attendance falls below 92%, a causing concern letter may be sent by the school. A meeting may be held with the class teacher, the attendance coordinator or the Headteacher. A further 2 letters are sent out if improvement is not made. A penalty warning letter may be issued, which will recommend a short monitoring period. If there is no improvement in attendance, a fine may be issued. A *fixed penalty notice* may be issued if there are repeated unauthorised absences. This is £120 per parent per child (reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days).
- Request for medical evidence – Where a child has repeated absences due to illness reported by parents, school may ask for medical evidence to support this. Where there are concerns school has the right to report this as an *unauthorised absence*.
- If a child's attendance falls below 90% (to date) and a substantial part of this is *unauthorised* a referral will be made to the Education Welfare Service; an officer may visit the home and seek to ensure that the parents understand the seriousness of the situation and to discuss any issues relating to attendance. They may issue formal warning letters and if necessary, conduct a prosecution. When it has become necessary to make a referral to the Education Welfare Officer [EWO], all further absences will be unauthorised unless supported by medical evidence. The EWO liaises with the school regarding absences following contact with the parents.
- A Penalty notice will be issued if a child is removed for a holiday in term time. (see next section – Requests for leave of absence)

Requests for leave of absence:

We believe that children need to be in school for all sessions, so that they can make the most progress possible. However, we do understand that there are *exceptional circumstances* where a parent may legitimately request leave of absence for a child to attend, for example, a special event. We expect parents to contact the school in advance for school to consider whether the request can be authorised. If a pupil misses more than 10 days of school, then the school will consider removing the child from the school roll. The school has the right to do this under government legislation. Parents needing exceptional circumstances for absence to be considered should make an appointment to discuss this with the Headteacher.

Holidays in Term Time

Important amendments have been made to the 2006 regulations in the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013.

These amendments came into force on 1 September 2013 and remove references to family holiday and extended leave as well as the statutory threshold of ten school days which Headteachers used to be allowed to grant. The amendments make it clear that Headteachers may **not** grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are *exceptional circumstances*.

This means that, from 1st September 2013, the Headteacher of St Stephen's CE Primary School **cannot** authorise any holidays in term time other than in *exceptional circumstances*. These occasions will be extremely rare. Parents should also be aware that by taking children out of school they will be issued with a *fixed penalty notice* for such periods of unauthorised holiday absence. This is £60 per parent per child (which increases to £120 each if not paid within 28 days).

Exceptional circumstances may include

Significant family occasions involving a **close** family member (e.g. – funeral, wedding). The Headteacher will determine the limit of days to be granted under this heading (usually no more than 2 days).

Any granting of leave does not set a precedent for similar future requests and the frequency / duration of such leave periods will be considered as factors in any decisions.

The Headteacher of St Stephen's will **not** consider authorising a request if:

- It is during transition time as a pupil is settling into the school. This means during the autumn term for both Reception and in Year 1. Also, throughout the whole school during the first two weeks of September.
- It is before or during SATs or any other public examination.
- The pupil already has any unauthorised absences.
- It is due to the availability of desired accommodation or cheaper holidays.

Penalty Notices for Non- school attendance:

Section 444(A) of the Education Act 1996 empowers the local authority to issue Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absence from school. This means that when a pupil has unauthorised absence of 10 sessions (5 days) or more, in any 12-week period (where no acceptable reason has been given for the absence) or if their child persistently arrives late for school after the close of registration, their parents or carers may receive a Penalty Notice fine of £60, which must be paid within 21 days. If payment is made after 21 days but within 28 days, the penalty is increased to £120. Where a fine remains unpaid after 28 days, the matter will be referred to the Borough Solicitor, who will consider instigating criminal proceedings.

In law, an offence occurs if a parent or carer fails to secure a child's regular attendance at school. Tameside Education Welfare Service, in conjunction with schools and Greater Manchester Police, will use these powers as an early deterrent to prevent patterns of unauthorised absence developing.

Parents may also receive a Penalty Notice without a warning letter for the offence of failing to secure regular school attendance for the following reasons:

*If their child is stopped on a truancy sweep more than once

*If they go on holiday in term time or are late returning from an authorised absence

*If their child fails to return to school following a fixed term exclusion

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 also makes it an offence if a parent fails to ensure that their child is not in a public place during the first 5 days of a fixed term or permanent exclusion. Penalty Notices may be issued in relation to this matter.

School Responsibility

The Senior Management Team and all teaching staff work to ensure a high level of enjoyment and commitment to learning as a means of ensuring regular attendance. The Headteacher holds responsibility for attendance matters, supported by the Attendance coordinator, the Learning Mentor, and the Office staff. Where school attendance problems occur, the school will endeavour to work with parents in the interests of the child to achieve a resolution. Attendance is recorded, and data stored and analysed

using the SIMS Attendance module. It is a statutory duty for Class teachers to call and maintain accurate registers and there are valid safety reasons to do so; these are legal documents and may be called for as evidence in case of legal proceedings. Class teachers are legally responsible for marking their class attendance register twice per day at the start of each session.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Glossary

Parent - Throughout this policy the term 'parent' represents one or both parents / carers with parental responsibility.

Authorised absence - An absence is classified as authorised when a child has been away from school for a legitimate reason and the school has received notification from a parent or guardian. Only the school can make an absence authorised. Parents do not have this authority. Consequently, not all absences supported by parents will be classified as authorised.

Unauthorised absence - An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of the school. Therefore, the absence is unauthorised if a child is away from school without good reason, even with the support of a parent.