

Introduction

At Oldfields Hall Middle School we:

- respect others
- enrich lives
- make a difference

We are committed to working together to ensure all children receive the best education possible and to enable them to make progress and do as well as they can. For this to happen children clearly need to be in school. This policy aims to make clear what is expected of parents and children and to assure parents of our willingness to work positively with them if problems arise.

Principles

Promoting positive behaviour and excellent attendance is the responsibility of the whole school community. The school will promote the importance of positive behaviour and good attendance through the curriculum and personal/social opportunities. Good attendance and behaviour by pupils will be recognised appropriately. All children should be at school, on time, every day the school is open, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. We will ensure that parents are aware of attendance matters as they relate to their child and work with them to ensure good attendance and punctuality.

All children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems that arise with attendance are best resolved between the school, the parents 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 may make things worse. Permitting absence from school without a good reason is an offence by the parent.

The attendance policy includes procedural referral agreements that are designed to promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils. Schools have a duty in law to refer any absence of 10 days or more where they have been unable to make contact with the parent/child or have general concerns about the absence to the Education Welfare Service.

Schools are required to take an attendance register twice a day, and this shows whether the pupil is present, engaged in an approved educational activity off-site, or absent. If a pupil of compulsory school age is absent every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school, as either **AUTHORISED** or **UNAUTHORISED**. Only school can authorise the absence, not parents. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required, preferably in writing.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like 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
- 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

Parents/carers have the prime responsibility for ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually. They have a legal responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly and on time, properly dressed, with the correct equipment and ready to learn. Parents may be prosecuted if a child does not attend school regularly and punctually. This will be done under the 1996 Education Act, Section 444. It aims to ensure that parents carry out their duty to secure suitable education for their children. If a child is in the care of foster carers or in a residential home, it is important that the carers recognise their parenting role where attendance to school is concerned. They will be supported by close co-operation between the school, education welfare services and social services where such a child's attendance is irregular.

Parents whose children are experiencing difficulties should contact the school at an early stage and work together with the staff in resolving any problems. This is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be sorted out in this way, the school or parent may refer the child to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO). He/she will try to resolve the situation with voluntary support, if other ways of trying to improve the child's attendance has failed, these Officers can issue Penalty Notices or use court proceedings to prosecute the parents or seek an Educational Supervision Order on the child. The maximum penalty on conviction is a fine of £2500 and/or 3 months imprisonment.

Alternatively, parents or pupils may wish to contact the EWO themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. Their telephone number is available from the school office.

Oldfields Hall Middle School employs Attend EDC Ltd, an Independent Education Welfare Company. They will work with the school to raise attendance and deal with welfare matters. They will communicate with parents if there is an issue they can support the school with.

Responsibilities

The Deputy Headteacher has lead responsibility in the school for the Attendance Policy which is developed in consultation with pupils, staff, parents, the lead governor for Behaviour and Attendance and the Local Authority.

The policy will be reviewed annually; the Deputy Headteacher is responsible for leading the review and consulting representatives from the school community.

The policy directly links with the following school policies:

- Safeguarding
- Anti-bullying
- Equality
- Behaviour

The Governing Body should:

- formally approve the policy;
- in liaison with the Head Teacher, ensure that the policy operates to promote equality for all pupils in line with the Equality Act 2010.

Procedures

The school applies the following procedures:

Registration

The register will be taken twice a day, at the start of the morning and the afternoon. School starts at 8:55. Children arriving after the register has been taken but before 9:15 are recorded as late but they will get a mark. Morning registration closes at 9:15 and children arriving at school after this time are "late - after registration closes" and this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence unless there is an acceptable reason for the lateness.

Similarly, afternoon registration takes place at 1:15 (the beginning of lesson 4). Children arriving after the register has been taken will be marked as late. Afternoon registration closes at 1:35. Children arriving late will be recorded as an unauthorised absence unless there is an acceptable reason for lateness.

Absence

If a child is absent from school, we ask parents to:

- Contact the school office, preferably by 9:00 on each day of absence (for safeguarding reasons)
- Send in a letter explaining the reason for absence when the child returns to school
- Reply promptly to any request or inquiry concerning an absence

If parents do not contact the school on the morning of the first day of absence, a member of the administration staff will try to contact them, usually via text, to find out the reason for absence using our

absence procedures. This ensures that the parent is aware their child is not in school enabling the parent, where necessary, to establish that their child is safe.

Decisions about whether to authorise the absence or record it as an unauthorised absence will be made within the guidance set out in the 1996 Education Act, which identifies the following reasons as acceptable reasons for an authorised absence.

- The child is ill or is prevented from attending by unavoidable cause
- The child lives over a certain distance from the school and either the LA has failed to make suitable arrangements to register the child at a nearer school or the LA has failed to make suitable transport arrangements
- The child is absent on days exclusively set apart for religious/belief observance in their particular religion or belief
- The child is absent 'with leave'. This refers to leave being granted by the school, not by the parent.

A reason for a period of absence is always required. The school will contact parents who have not offered a reason and after a two week process will mark the absence as unauthorised if no suitable reason is provided.

Medical Absence

Schools have the responsibility to decide whether an absence can be authorised on medical grounds. In a few cases parents may be asked to provide evidence that their child is too unwell to attend school by providing a note from a medical professional. If the school has concerns about the level of medical absence that a pupil has incurred they will contact the parents/carers to discuss it further and to find out whether their GP or other health professional has been contacted.

If attendance does not improve the school may request parents seek a note of explanation from the relevant health professional or may involve the school nurse. If despite the request for the note of explanation, no note is forthcoming, school may not be able to authorise absences unless satisfactory medical evidence is provided to support the pupil's inability to attend school.

Children Missing in Education

Schools have a duty by law to refer any absence of 20 days or more to Staffordshire County Council's Children Missing in Education department where they have been unable to make contact with the parent/child or have general concerns about the absence.

In order to avoid any referrals, parents are requested to inform the school if they are moving house/area or country and to provide a forwarding address, contact number and the name of new school if known.

Requests for leave of absence

Leave of absence requests, including holiday leave requests, may only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

If a parent wishes to request leave for their child for any reason they must apply in advance and in writing or by email to the head teacher. Where a child does not reside with both parents, it is the responsibility of the parent making the request to inform the other parent. The school will send a reply to both parents.

If a request for leave has not been received and we have reason to believe a pupil is on holiday, a letter will be sent to Parents requesting medical evidence. If no medical evidence can be provided the absence may be coded as unauthorised and a penalty notice request sent to the Local Authority. Parents will also be requested to attend a meeting with the Education Welfare Officer.

Medical and Dental Appointments

We expect parents to make medical and dental appointments for their children before or after school or during the school holidays whenever possible. If this is not possible then authorisation will be given where confirmation of the appointment is received via one of the methods already listed. Children are expected to attend school prior to the appointment and parents expected to return their children to school following the appointment whenever possible.

Monitoring attendance and lateness

The school aims to achieve at least 97% attendance each year. To help with this, we monitor attendance regularly. The school has established a system for monitoring attendance and lateness, the purpose and aims of which are as follows:

1. To improve the overall percentage of attendance and improve pupils' punctuality at school.
2. To make attendance and punctuality a high priority for all those associated with the school including pupils, parents, staff and governors.
3. To provide support, advice and guidance to parents and pupils.
4. To develop a systematic approach to gathering and analysing attendance and punctuality related data.
5. To develop and implement an effective system of communication between school and home.
6. To reward good attendance and punctuality.
7. To work effectively with the Local Authority and other agencies that support attendance and punctuality

Our Independent Education Welfare Officer from Attend EDC regularly monitors pupil's attendance that fall below the school's annual attendance target. Where there appears to be a particular problem with attendance, the following procedures are applied;

- A letter is sent to parents informing them of a decline in school attendance and the need for this to improve due to the impact on the pupil's education
- If school attendance continues to decline, a further concern letter is sent to parents
- If still no improvement seen, parents and pupils will be invited into a meeting with the Education Welfare Officer to discuss the concerns and to offer support around any possible barriers or problems at home or at school which may be contributing to poor school attendance. The discussion held will be documented by the EWO and an action plan to improve school attendance will be devised with parents and pupil during the meeting and a review date set if needed.
- If school attendance does not improve, the school may follow Staffordshire County Councils Code of Conduct for issuing penalty notices for persistent absence. More information can be found at; <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/welfareservice/Attendance/home.aspx>

Circumstances where a Penalty Notice may be issued

Parents/carers have the legal responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly and on time, properly dressed, with the correct equipment and ready to learn. Parents may be prosecuted if a child does not attend school regularly and punctually. This will be done under the 1996 Education Act, Section 444. It aims to ensure that parents carry out their duty to secure suitable education for their children. If a child is in the care of foster carers or in a residential home, it is important that the carers recognise their parenting role where attendance to school is concerned. They will be supported by close co-operation between the school, education welfare services and social services where such a child's attendance is irregular.

Penalty Notices may be considered appropriate if one of the following criteria is met:

- There is unauthorised persistent absence. "Persistent" means at least 20 sessions of unauthorised absence over a period of twelve school weeks, excluding holidays. These absences do not need to be consecutive.
- There is a period of absence not authorised by the head teacher or in excess of the period authorised by the head teacher.(e.g. family holiday)
- Persistent late arrival at school, i.e. after the register has closed. "Persistent" means at least 10 sessions of unauthorised late arrival over a period of 12 school weeks, excluding holidays. These late episodes do not need to be consecutive.
- The presence of an excluded child in a public place at any time during school hours in that child's first five days of exclusion. An "excluded child" is one who has been excluded from school for a given period under the Education and Inspections Act 2006.
- A Penalty Notice will not be issued in respect of children in the care of the LA with whom other interventions will be used.

A session is equivalent to half a day in school.

Other conditions

- There will be no limit on the times a Penalty Notice for unauthorised leave of absence can be used in an academic year
- In cases where there is more than one pupil in a family with unauthorised absences, Penalty Notices may be issued for more than one child
- Use of a Penalty Notice or formal warning of a Penalty Notice for unauthorised persistent absence / lateness will be restricted to one notice/ warning per parent of a pupil per academic year.

As part of this process the parent(s) will first be issued with a 20 day notice period, clearly advising that if unauthorised absence / lateness occurs in this 20 day period, a Penalty Notice may be issued. This is to allow the parents a further period to address their child's irregular attendance by working with the school or other agencies. It is part of a scaled approach and affords the parents an opportunity to avoid receiving a penalty notice. This is seen as good practice and integral to a proportionate response.

Therefore, the process is as follows:

- School completes and signs a penalty notice request form.
- School provides the pupils attendance registration certificate signed by the Head teacher / Principal – or their nominated deputy – confirming that non-attendance / lateness during the period was unauthorised.
- School provides an assessment and plan which demonstrates that the use of a Penalty Notice is now the appropriate action to improve the child's school attendance / punctuality.
- The local authority issues a 20 day Warning Notice to the parent (s) advising them of the possibility of a Penalty Notice being issued and that the child must have no unauthorised absence / lateness during the set period.
- If there are unauthorised absences / lateness in the period and after due consideration of the facts of the case with the school, issue a Penalty Notice through the post.

Please note:

Where the Penalty Notice is requested from a school in response to a leave of absence (holiday) related unauthorised absence or is in relation to an offence under section 103 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the formal warning letter and 20 day improvement period will not apply.

All Penalty Notices are entered onto a database maintained by Families First to ensure that no duplicate Penalty Notices are issued.

Use of a Penalty Notice or formal warning of a Penalty Notice for unauthorised persistent absence / lateness will be restricted to one notice/ warning per parent of a pupil per academic year.

Payment of Penalty Notices:

Arrangements for payment will be detailed on the Penalty Notice.

The penalty notice fine would be:

- £60 per parent per child if paid within 21 days, rising to
- £120 per parent per child if paid between 21 – 28 days.
- If the fine is not paid within 28 days you may be prosecuted under section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996.

If prosecution takes place under section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996 the maximum fine is £1000 per parent per child. This reflects the seriousness of unauthorised absence from school.

The County Council retains any revenue from Penalty Notices to cover enforcement costs (collection or prosecuting in the event of non-payment).

Non-payment of Penalty Notices:

Non-payment of a Penalty Notice will result in the withdrawal of the Penalty Notice and will trigger the fast-track prosecution process under the provisions of section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996.

Elective Home Education

If school receives written notification from parents that they wish to home educate their child then we will inform the Local Authority of the decision to remove the child's name from the admissions register. Whilst school will not seek to prevent parents from choosing to electively home educate their child, neither will they seek to encourage them to do this – particularly as a way of avoiding exclusion or due to a poor attendance record. Prior to making a decision to Elective Home Educate, Parents are requested to contact Staffordshire County Councils Elective Home Education department;

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/Elective-Home-Education/Elective-Home-Education.aspx>

Summary

It is vital to a child's progress that they attend school as often as possible and that they are on time. There are strong and proven links between pupil attendance and educational achievement. Attendance of less than 95% (equivalent to 9.5 days or more absence in a school year) has been shown to compromise pupil attainment. An attendance of 90% is equivalent to missing 19 days or nearly 4 weeks from school in a year. Only 10% of pupils who are persistently absent from school achieve 5 A*-C grades at GCSE.

Impact of absence:

90% attendance = 19 days off school

85% attendance = 29 days off school (a whole half term!)

80% attendance = 38 days off school

70% attendance = 57 days off school (a whole term!)

Impact of lateness:

Over a school year –

5 minutes late every day = 3 days absent

15 minutes late every day = 10 days absent

30 minutes late every day = 19 days absent

If parents have any concerns relating to attendance or lateness that they wish to discuss, they should contact the Headteacher in the first instance. School staff are committed to working with parents as the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend.

Where a family requires support with attendance or other matters, the school can make a referral to other agencies such as the Local Support Team who may be able to offer assistance. The school liaises regularly with the LST. The EWW is fully aware of the school's arrangements for monitoring attendance and support all its procedures.

GREEN GROUP
96% - 100%
WELL DONE - THIS IS EXCELLENT!

YELLOW GROUP
90.1% - 95.9%
LOW ATTENDANCE

RED GROUP
Less than 90%
PERSISTENT ABSENCE PUPIL

Policy reviewed	November 2019
Adopted by the OHMS Governing Body	November 2019
Date of next review	November 2020
Chair of Governors	Mr S Clarke