



## **Whitchurch Church of England Federation**

### **Attendance Policy**

**Implementation Date – March 2020**

**Review Date – March 2023**

## **Introduction**

We believe that the primary years are an important time when the foundations for learning are made and good attendance is therefore vital. Children need to attend the academies regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them by law.

Regular attendance is a major factor that contributes to a child's progress. If your child has 10 days of absence during the year, his or her attendance for the school year will be only 94.7% and therefore at the level where there is likely to be an impact on learning. If your child had 10 days of absence every year over the 7 years spent at primary school, it would be equivalent to him or her missing an entire term in school!

Clearly there will be occasions when a child is unable to attend our academies e.g. due to illness. However, we ask that all other absences are kept to a minimum and avoided if at all possible.

In law, parents/carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular and punctual attendance of their child at the school at which the child is registered, unless the absence has been authorised by the school. Only schools have the power to authorise or grant a leave of absence.

Absence and reasons for absence are monitored on a daily basis. Therefore, if your child is absent through illness it is helpful if you can telephone the appropriate academy (preferably between 8:30am and 9.00am). There is an answer phone where you can leave a message.

To support you in monitoring your child's attendance throughout the year, we may contact you by letter if your child's attendance is beginning to become a concern and needs to improve.

The Federation are committed to supporting parents and carers who are finding school attendance an issue. A Federation based Family Support worker is available for support and advice.

We welcome parents to discuss any issues that they may be having, with the class teacher, Head of School or Family Support Worker. There may be practical advice and support that can be given or signposting to other agencies may be useful.

### **Through this policy we aim to:**

- Improve pupil's achievement by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality.
- Create an ethos in which good attendance and punctuality is recognised as the norm and seen to be valued by the Federation.
- Achieve a minimum of 96.5% attendance for all children, apart from those with chronic health issues.
- Raise awareness of the importance of pupil's uninterrupted attendance and punctuality at every stage of a child's education with parents, carers and pupils.
- Ensure that our policy applies to Nursery and Reception aged children (as well as KS1 and KS2) to establish good habits from an early age.
- Work in partnership with pupils, parents, staff and the Education Welfare Service, so that all pupils realise their potential, unhindered by unnecessary absences.

- Promote a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which pupils feel safe, secure, valued and encouraged to take responsibility for their learning.
- Establish a pattern of monitoring attendance and ensure consistency in recognising achievement and dealing with difficulties.
- Recognise the key role of all staff, but especially class teachers in promoting good attendance.

We maintain and promote good attendance and punctuality through:

- Raising awareness of attendance and punctuality issues among all staff, parents and pupils.
- Ensuring that parents have an understanding of the responsibility placed on them for making sure their child attend regularly and punctually.
- Maintaining effective communication with parents, pupils, staff and governors on school attendance matters.
- Developing and implementing procedures for identifying, reporting and reviewing cases of poor attendance and persistent lateness.
- Supporting pupils who have been experiencing any difficulties at home or at the academy and nursery which are preventing good attendance.
- Developing and implementing procedures to follow up non-attendance at the acadmies and nursery.
- Developing initiatives to promote and celebrate good attendance.

### **Definitions; Understanding types of absence – Authorised and Unauthorised**

Pupils are expected to attend school every day for the entire duration of the academic year, unless there is an **exceptional reason** for the absence. There are two main categories of absences:

**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 form the parent/carer. For example, if the parent has phoned to explain that their child has been unwell and this is the reason for their absence. 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 that is classified as unauthorised, is when a child is away from the school without the permission of the school. Therefore, the absence is unauthorised if a child is away from school without good reason. This includes:

- Parents giving their children permission to be off school unnecessarily, such as for shopping, birthdays, or to visit family members.
- Absences which have not been explained.

A school may if required change an authorised absence to unauthorised absence and vice versa if new information is presented. Any changes will be communicated with parents/carers. For example, a parent may state a child is unwell and absent, and on return to school it is evident the child has been on holiday.

## **Procedures**

Our academies will undertake to follow the following procedures to support good attendance:

- To maintain appropriate registration processes.
- To maintain appropriate attendance data.
- To communicate clearly the attendance procedures and expectations to all staff, governors, parents and pupils.
- To have consistent and systematic daily records which give detail of any absence and lateness.
- To follow up absences and persistent lateness if parents/ carers have not communicated with the academy.
- To inform parents/ carers what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absences.
- To strongly discourage unnecessary absence through holidays taken during term time.
- To work with parents/carers to improve individual's attendance and punctuality.
- To refer to the Educational Welfare Services any child whose attendance causes concern and where parents/carers have not responded to academy initiatives to improve.
- To report attendance to Shropshire Council and the Department for Education as requested.

## **Responsibilities**

All members of Federation staff have a responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and punctuality. The following includes a more specific list of the kinds of responsibilities which individuals might have.

### **Head of School**

The Head of School is responsible for:

- Overall monitoring of school attendance.
- Monitoring trends in authorised and unauthorised absence.
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised.
- Regularly meeting with administration staff and Family support worker to monitor academy attendance figures.
- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and / or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents / carers.

### **Class teacher**

Class teachers are responsible for:

- Informing the Senior Leadership Team where there are concerns and acting upon them.
- Providing background information to support referrals.
- Monitoring follow-up once actions have been taken to improve attendance concerns.

- Emphasising with their class the importance of good attendance and promptness.
- Celebrating good attendance with class pupils through the **Be Here Bear, On Time Ted** and the **Cool to be in School** initiatives. (As appropriate in each academy)
- Following up absences with immediate requests for explanation which should be noted.
- Discussing attendance issues at consultation evenings where necessary.

### **Administration Staff**

Administration staff in each academy office are responsible for:

- Collating and recording registration and attendance information.
- Talking to and recording messages from parents regarding attendance.
- Ensuring that late children are signed in, including reasons for lateness.
- Contacting parents of absent children where no contact has been made by parents.
- Ensuring children are signed out of school and record reasons if leaving early.
- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking at particularly for either poor attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and / or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/ carers and reporting concerns to the Head of School and Family Support Worker.
- Regularly meeting with the Head of School and Family support worker to monitor school attendance figures.
- Making referrals to Education Welfare Service.
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion with the Education Welfare Service.
- Sending out standard letters regarding attendance.

### **Family Support Worker**

The family support worker is responsible for:

- Contacting families where concerns are raised about attendance including arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues.
- Making referrals to the Education Welfare Service.
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion with the Education Welfare Service.
- Regularly meet with administration staff and the Head of School to monitor school attendance figures.
- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking at particularly for either poor attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and / or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/ carers and reporting concerns to the Head of School.
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence.

## **Parents**

**Ensuring children's regular attendance at school is a parents' /carers legal responsibility (section 444 of the 1996 Education Act) and permitting absence from school, that is not authorised by the school, creates an offence in law.**

Parents/Carers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually unless prevented from doing so by illness or attendance at medical appointments.
- Contacting the relevant academy office on the first morning of absence between 8.30 – 9.00am. (an answer phone is available before 8.30am).
- Supporting the Federation, with their child in aiming for at least 96.5 % attendance each year.
- Making sure that absence is clearly accounted for by phone on the first and subsequent days of absence.
- Informing the relevant academy in advance of any medical appointments in school time. For the absence to be recorded as a medical appointment we require evidence from the doctor or dentist (medical letter or appointment card)
- Avoiding taking their child out of school for non-urgent medical or dental appointments.
- Only requesting for leave of absence if it is exceptional circumstances.
- Requesting written permission by the Head of school, for any absence that is not illness related, including medical appointments.
- Ensuring that their child is in school every morning at 8.50am at the Infant academy and 8:45am at the Junior academy ready for registration.
- Working in partnership with the school on matters concerning their child's continued good attendance, including informing the relevant academy (in confidence) of any circumstances which may be affecting their child's attendance.
- Providing a doctor's note for any prolonged ill-health.

## **Registration and recording absence**

The Infant academy doors open at 8.50am and close at 9.00am and Junior academy doors open at 8:45am and close at 9.00am. Nursery sessions differ depending on the age of the children and their Early Years entitlement, and parents/ carers are made aware of times of sessions at registration. It is vital that children in school and nursery are at school at the start of their sessions and also collected promptly. The start of the school day/ sessions are used to promote independence in self-help skills as well as being used for learning time. If a child is late they can miss work, time with the class teacher and peers, as well as cause disruption to the lesson, themselves and others. In addition, it can be embarrassing arriving late and may lead to further absences.

Legally the attendance register must be marked twice a day, at the start of the morning and afternoon session.

## **Morning**

Children must be in school ready for registration at 8.50am at the Infant academy and 8:50am at the Junior academy. A child arriving before the attendance register has closed

(between 9:00am and 9:30am) will be marked as late. Those arriving after the attendance register has closed will be recorded as unauthorised unless the school has been notified in advance.

### **Afternoon**

The register will be marked again after lunch for those children in school. Afternoon nursery children need to be in school at the time stated at registration depending on their Early Years entitlement (15 or 30 hours).

Each class teacher has the responsibility for keeping an accurate record of attendance. Any child who is absent must be recorded as such at the beginning of the morning and afternoon session. The attendance register must be completed by the class teacher and attendance records are documented using ARBOR software. Attendance records are legal documents and these must be kept secure and preserved for a period of three years after the date they were last used.

A child not attending school is considered a **Safeguarding** matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required.

### **If a child is absent we will:**

- Telephone parents / carers on the first day of absence if we have not received a message. Any LAC or vulnerable pupil who is marked absent without a reason will be reported to the designated safeguarding lead and safeguarding procedures followed.
- Invite parents / carers to discuss the situation with a member of our Family Support Worker or Head of school if absences persist.
- Refer the matter to the local authority's Education Welfare Service if absence is unauthorised and falls below 90%.

### **Continued or Ongoing Absence**

Absence for whatever reason disadvantages a child by creating gaps in learning. Research shows these gaps affect attainment when attendance falls below 95%. Therefore, attendance is monitored across The Whitchurch CE Federation and data is shared with the Local Authority and the Department for Education. If a child has had absence and their attendance level is falling towards 90%, the academy will contact parents/carers. Depending on the reasons for the absence, an invitation to the academy will be issued in order to meet the Family Support Worker to discuss ways to improve the child's attendance. This discussion will also include the legal implications of such absences.

Parents/ carers will be offered support by the academy, as the academy has all children's best interests at the forefront of our ethos. If there are further factors which concern parents about their child, referrals may be suggested to Shropshire Early Help to request additional support.

Children at The Whitchurch CE Federation are dependent on their parents/carers, who are responsible for their child's level of attendance and punctuality. It is vital that children enjoy coming to school, and parents have the responsibility to be positive role models to their child by encouraging them to be in school on time with the appropriate equipment for a school day.

## **Lateness and Punctuality**

Once the doors are closed at **9.00 am** the only entrance into each academy is via the academy office. Any child coming into school after the doors are closed will be marked as late in the attendance record. Records are kept of those children who are late and this information may be required by the courts, should a prosecution for non-attendance or lateness be necessary. Arrival after the close of registration (**9.30am**) will be marked as unauthorised absence code "U" in line with Shropshire Council and Department for Education guidance. This mark shows them to be on site, but is legally recorded as absence. If a pupil is marked late due to a medical appointment, they will receive an authorised absence coded "M".

Pupils who are consistently late are disrupting not only their own education but also that of other pupils. **Parents/ carers will be seen to be failing to meet their legal responsibilities to ensure that their child is receiving full time education. On-going and repeated lateness is considered as unauthorised absence and will be subject to legal action.** See appendix A for information on penalty notices and other legal measures.

Where there have been persistent incidents of lateness parents/carers will receive a letter advising them of the concerns and the individual academy will provide opportunities for parents/carers to seek support and advice to address these issues. If support is not accepted and lateness and absences are still an issue parents will face legal measures including prosecution through the Magistrates Court, Fixed Penalty Notices, Parenting Orders and Parenting Contracts.

## **Monitoring**

The Head of school, Family Support worker and Administration staff meet regularly to monitor attendance data and appropriate actions are taken following these meetings such as letters sent to parents or meetings arranged to discuss attendance concerns with parents. Concerns are also referred to the Education Welfare Officer. The Education Welfare Officer visits the academies regularly each term to check and monitor attendance. The Education Welfare Officer works with each academy and parents to improve children's attendance, and may issue fixed penalty notices if attendance meetings held by the school do not improve attendance.

## **Request for Leave of Absence**

**Amendments to school attendance regulations were updated and enforced from September 2013, the Education Regulations (Pupil registration: England) state that:**

**Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.**

It is important to note that Headteachers can determine the length of the authorised absence as well as whether absence is authorised at all. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, or unavoidable which means the event could not

reasonably be scheduled at another time. There are no rules on this as circumstances vary from school to school and family to family. There is however, no legal entitlement for time off in school time to go on holiday and in **most cases holiday will not be authorised**. Parents/carers wishing to apply for leave of absence need to fill in an application form, available from the academy office (in advance and before making any travel arrangements)

**Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking children out during school time.**

## **Appendix A**

### **Penalty notices for Non-Attendance and other legal measures.**

In Education law, parents/carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular attendance of their child of compulsory school age at the school at which their child is registered, unless the absence has been authorised by the school.

### **Legal Measures for tackling persistent absence or lateness**

Shropshire Council will use the full range of legal matters to secure good attendance. **This includes Fixed Penalty Notices, Prosecution through the Magistrates Court, Parenting Orders and Parenting Contracts.**

### **What is a Penalty Notice?**

Under existing legislation, parents/carers commit an offence if a child fails to attend school regularly and the absences are classed as unauthorised (those for which the school cannot or has not given permission). Depending on circumstances such cases may result in

prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996. Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 gives powers to the Local Authority and other designated bodies to issue Penalty Notices where a parent/carer is considered capable of but unwilling to secure an improvement in their child's school attendance. A Penalty Notice is an alternative to prosecution, which does not require an appearance in Court whilst still securing an improvement in a pupil's attendance. Payment of a Penalty Notice enables parents to discharge potential liability for conviction.

### **Why has it been introduced?**

Reducing absence from school is a key priority nationally and locally because missing school damages a pupil's attainment levels, disrupts school routines and the learning of others and can leave a pupil vulnerable to anti-social behaviour and youth crime. Above all, missing school seriously affects children's longer term life opportunities.

### **What are the costs?**

**Payment within 21 days of receipt of a Notice is £60 and £120 if paid after this but within 28 days.**

### **When are they used?**

Shropshire Council considers that regular attendance at school is of such importance that Penalty Notices may be used in a range of situations where unauthorised absence occurs:

- Overt truancy (including pupils found during truancy sweeps)
- Inappropriate parentally-condoned absence.
- Unauthorised holidays in term time or excessive delayed return from an extended holiday without prior school permission.
- Persistent late arrival at school (after the Register has closed).

In every case a pupil will have had a minimum of 10 school sessions (i.e. 5 school days) lost to unauthorised absence during a term before a Penalty Notice is considered. The Authority never takes such action lightly and would far rather work with parents/ carers to improve attendance without having to resort to any enforcement actions. Attendance is of such importance to all of us that the Authority will use the powers if this is the only way of securing a child's schooling.

**For further information, parents can access Shropshire Councils information on Fixed Penalty Notices and other legal matters - <http://new.shropshire.gov.uk/media/7071/fixed-penalty-notices-code-of-conduct.pdf> <http://new.shropshire.gov.uk/media/7070/fixed-penalty-notices-advice-to-parents-andcarers.pdf>**