



The Good Shepherd Primary School Attendance Policy

Summer 2021

1: Attendance Legislation

Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996 a parent is responsible for making sure that their child of compulsory school age receives a full-time education that is suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs that the child may have. This can be regular attendance at school or by education otherwise.

If a child of compulsory school age who is registered at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, then the parent may be guilty of an offence under Section 444(1) / (1A) of the Education Act 1996.

If children are to succeed in their education and reach their full potential, it is essential they attend school regularly and are punctual. Parents are informed of the school's expectations and procedures through induction processes, newsletters and other communication between school and home.

Our school staff will always contact parents to notify them of a cause for concern in relation to their child's attendance.

2: Aims

- The Good Shepherd seeks to ensure that all children in its care receive a full-time education which maximises opportunities for achieving their potential.
- The Good Shepherd strives to provide a welcoming, caring environment, whereby each member of the community feels safe and valued.
- All staff will work with children and their families to encourage each child to attend school regularly and punctually.
- The school operates an effective system of age-appropriate incentives and rewards which acknowledges the efforts of children and families to improve attendance and punctuality and will challenge and support families and parents / carers who give low priority to attendance and punctuality.

To meet these objectives, the school will establish an effective and efficient system of communication with children, parents and appropriate external agencies to provide mutual information, guidance and support. The school has a computerised attendance package (SIMS) which is used to take twice daily registers and monitor attendance data.

3: Home/School Partnership

Securing a high level of attendance requires the school and home to work closely together. To achieve this, it is

essential that parents/carers:

- Ensure their child attends school regularly and on time.
- Work with the school to promote good attendance and punctuality.
- Notify the school of a child's illness on each day of absence using the absence line including an estimation of the likely length of absence and reason for absence.
- Contact the school as soon as possible about any concerns they have about their child's attendance.

In return, The Good Shepherd will:

- Contact home on the first day of absence if no message has been received.
- Follow up promptly any concerns that parents/carers have that may be affecting their child's engagement and attendance to school.
- Regularly and consistently remind children of the importance of good attendance and punctuality.
- Provide the services of Family Support to assist families who are struggling to ensure their child(ren) arrive at school on time and every day.
- Complete attendance intervention, including home visits, to ensure that any reason for absence is clarified and that a child's pace of learning isn't affected by absence.

4. Pupil Absence:

Parents must inform the school by 09.30 if their child is absent and give the reason for and likely duration of the absence. A message can be left on the school absence line or Parentmail.

The register is taken by the class teacher at the start of the school day.

- The school gates open after 8.35am.
- Registers will be taken by 9.00am.
- Any child arriving after 09.00 must report to the School Office, our single point of entry.
- The registers will be checked promptly after completion to identify children who are absent without notification.
- Registers will remain open for 30 minutes.
- By 9.30am we shall attempt to contact the parents of those children not in school and for whom no reasons for absence have been given.
- We will continue to ensure that absence is followed up where no response from home can be sought.

5: Unauthorised Absence:

Headteachers, or a designated officer on their behalf, have the power to decide if an absence is authorised. A request form, or notification of an absence, does not automatically give authorisation. Unauthorised absences include all unexplained or unjustified absences not relating to a child's ill-health and will include a reason not considered as authorised circumstances.

Unauthorised absence is any absence which does not fall into the following categories:

- Absence due to sickness or other unavoidable cause;
- An absence for religious observance sanctioned by the religious body to which the parents belong;
- Medical or dental appointments agreed prior to the absence (parents should seek to return their child within 30 minutes of the appointment);
- Agreed leave of absence under exceptional circumstances.

Only the school can authorise absence, not the parents, and the school is not obliged to accept the explanation offered as a valid reason.

The best interests of the child will be the deciding factor in deciding if an absence should be authorised or not.

6: Leave during term time for extended periods or holidays:

The Good Shepherd expects all children to attend school regularly and, as such, will not authorise any extended leave or holidays during term time unless in exceptional circumstances.

We also expect parents to share the same commitment to learning and to plan holidays and leave during the school holidays. If, in the extreme case, parents wish to request leave for exceptional circumstances, they must write to the Headteacher giving at least ten school days of notice. The Headteacher will consider each application and a nominated officer within the school will respond to parents with the outcome of the application.

As a school operating within West Northamptonshire Council, we are obliged to follow their policy with the escalation of unauthorised absence. As a parent, you are entitled to make representation to the Headteacher using our 'exceptional circumstances form' detailing the exceptional circumstances in which your request is based upon. If the reasons for absence detailed in the request are not deemed to be exceptional, the school may refer the absence to the Local Authority and an initial Penalty Notice of £120 per parent/adult for each child, reducing to £60 for early payment could be the outcome.

This would require payment being made directly to the Local Authority within 21 days. Please note that the school does not benefit financially from this action.

Non-payment may mean that the Penalty notice will rise to £120 after 21 days but within 28 days of receipt. If the penalty has not been paid within 28 days of issue the Local Authority may choose to instigate legal proceedings under section 444 (1) of the education act 1996. If found guilty of an offence under this Act, parents may receive a criminal record and could be fined up to £1000.

The Good Shepherd hopes that parents will work in partnership with us to prevent the local authority taking action for low school attendance.

7: Lateness:

A child is late if they arrive at school after 09.00.

Any child arriving after 09.00am will be marked as late. The registers will be coded accordingly (U/I) dependant on the time of arrival of the child.

The school may contact parents and put a punctuality plan in place in the event of continued concerns.

If no improvement is seen, the school will refer for support from the Local Authority. The local authority may choose to issue a fixed penalty notice should the threshold be met of unauthorised sessions absent.

8: Medical appointments:

Where possible, routine medical appointments should be booked for outside of the school day. In certain circumstances, where this is not possible, parents / carers should notify the school in writing or by showing the appointment letter or by telephone message of the time and date of the child's medical appointment. Children should attend school before and after the medical appointment as far as is practically possible.

We ask where possible that children miss no more than two hours of school for appointments.

In exceptional circumstances, and in the event where additional leave of absence may be necessary for medical appointments, the schools' Family Support Worker should be consulted. The school's SENDCO may be involved in this process.

9: Identification & Monitoring:

- Parents/Carers of children not in school are contacted initially by text message. If there is no response this is followed up by a telephone call on the first day of absence.
- If no contact is made a home visit may be undertaken.
- All verbal messages from parents are recorded centrally and the class teacher is informed.
- All verbal messages and notes from parents/carers are retained in the register.
- All parents/carers will be sent a letter if no reason is given for the absence.
- After two weeks if no reason is supplied for the absence, it will be noted as "unauthorised"

Leadership monitoring:

- The Headteacher, or a nominated officer on their behalf, checks registration procedures at least once per calendar month, to ensure consistency by all staff.
- The Governing Body is involved in target setting for the term.
- Attendance data for the whole school is presented to the Governing Body regularly.
- Governors are given an overview of strategies used and future action to be implemented for raising attendance.

10: Escalation System:

Our school target is 97% and each individual child's target is 100% attendance.

All children whose attendance falls below a nominated threshold for that individual term will be monitored weekly and will be treated as a child 'at risk of persistent absence'. Persistent absence is the official term for more than 10% of absence during the school year. This could be referred to as PA.

As a school operating within West Northamptonshire Council, we may choose to refer cases when the absence threshold is met for further investigation by the Local Authority. This could result in a fixed penalty notice being issued.

For continued attendance concerns, support will be offered to encourage the child to raise their attendance to above the school target using our staged escalation system.

- **Stage one** – parents/carers are made aware of the fall in attendance by a telephone call or message from the school to outline attendance concerns. Parents may receive a letter detailing the call.
- **Stage two** – a formal letter is sent to the parents/carers to outline the school’s major concerns in relation to the absence of the child. Advice will be given at this point that further absences will result in a parenting contract.
- **Stage three** – a meeting to discuss attendance and agree strategies to achieve targets.
- **Stage four** - a formal parenting contract invitation is sent to the home address and a meeting would be held in school to draw up formally the reasons for absence and for support to be put into place to ensure the regular attendance of the child. A home visit to conduct the meeting may take place if parents fail to attend without notice.
- **Stage five** – a formal review of the parenting contract to map any progress in the nominated period will be carried out. This meeting will be followed by three potential outcomes:
 - Attendance has improved enough and, as such, the child will be taken off the parenting contract and will be informally monitored.
 - Attendance has not improved enough, or the child would benefit from another review period, and therefore will be invited to review his or her attendance again in 4-6 weeks.
 - Attendance has continued to decline and therefore a referral to the Local Authority will be completed by the school.

Parents are made aware that the Headteacher or nominated officer acting on their behalf may escalate the process and/or make a referral to the Local Authority during any point of the escalation process if they feel attendance is deteriorating at a pace which may harm continuity of learning.

11. Attendance within the EYFS

The school actively seeks to promote good attendance from the point of admission and before children reach statutory school age so that children can form good habits for future learning.

Staff ensure that parents and children are aware of the importance of attending school each day through assemblies, newsletters and by direct work with the children.

Daily absence is tracked by the EYFS team and, in the case of no reason for absence, action is escalated in line with section 9 of this policy.

The school records, tracks and analyses the attendance data of all children within the EYFS provision and supports good attendance through an escalation system when attendance drops below threshold.

This escalation system is as follows:

- **Stage one:** Keyworker to identify that attendance is causing concern to the learning journey of the child. A phone call home is made to identify the reasons for absence, to express the importance of attendance and to issue a target of 100% attendance in a timed period.
- **Stage two:** A standard letter is sent home to make the parents aware of the increased concern in relation to

their child's attendance. Information is given relating to next steps.

- **Stage three:** An attendance surgery is held in school to address the concerns relating to the attendance of the child. This may convert to a parenting contract should the child reach statutory school age during the process.

12. The role of the Family Support Worker

The school employs designated staff to support attendance monitoring, recording, and reporting. The school's attendance team, led by the Family Support Worker, is responsible for maintaining the school's attendance operations in the following areas:

- Monitoring overall absence levels
- Monitoring individual caseloads of children with poor attendance
- Running initiatives to secure improvements in overall attendance
- Ensuring that individual children are supported following periods of extended absence
- Investigating lateness, absence and truancy
- Working in partnership with West Northamptonshire Council to provide evidence to support the work of the Local Authority to take legal action against parents whose children do not attend school regularly or on time.

13. Referrals for additional support

The school may complete referrals for additional support to the Local Authority's specialist teams in the following circumstances:

- The school has concerns in relation to safeguarding
- The absence threshold in a given period has been reached
- The school requires additional support in securing regular attendance of a child
- The escalation process has failed and targets haven't been met
- The child is missing in education with no contact for up to 10 school days
- The school is in receipt of a request for elective home education
- Any other concerns which the Headteacher deems a referral will support the child's learning

14: Relevant policies

- Home visit policy
- Safeguarding policy
- SEND policy