

Pear Tree School

Attendance Policy - Pupils

Introduction

Pear Tree is a successful school and your child plays their part in making it so. We aim for an environment which enables and encourages all members of our school community to reach out for excellence and *achieve the best they can in everything they do*. For our children to gain the greatest benefit from their education, it is vital that they attend school regularly and your child should be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.

Recently our school community has changed significantly, particularly within our lower school department and we have a significant number of children who are not able to attend school full time or who have prolonged absence due to ill health related to their medical condition. For this reason, our attendance policy needs to reflect these circumstances and acknowledge our responsibility in implementing measures to support the attendance of these children and our duty to provide more creative learning opportunities in other settings e.g. hospice, hospital, home.

Why regular attendance is so important:

Any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning. Any pupil's absence disrupts teaching routines so may also affect the learning of others in the same class. Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is your legal responsibility and permitting absence from school without a good reason creates an offence in law and may result in a prosecution.

Why it is important to provide regular activities for children who are too poorly to attend school:

Although a child may not be well enough to attend school, they may actually be well enough to access educational activities within their home/hospice/hospital. In this case, procedures outlined in the document "Children who are too poorly to attend school" will be followed. Such activities are important because they:

- maintain the link between home and school which in turn will aid the child's return to school;
- provide normality for the child and their family;
- provide educational stimulation for the child at home/hospice/hospital;
- enable the child to maintain their level of attainment and continue to make progress even though they can not attend school;
- enable the family/carers to be involved in their child's education and to deliver activities when the child is well enough;
- enable us to review the child's educational provision regularly and respond to any changes in their learning need.

Understanding types of absence:

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness, medical/dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been given. This type of absence can lead to the Authority using sanctions and/or legal proceedings. This includes:

- Parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily;
- truancy before or during the school day;
- absences which have never properly been explained;
- children who arrive at school too late to get a mark;
- shopping, looking after other children or birthdays;
- day trips and holidays in term time which have not been agreed;
- holidays that exceed the amount agreed by the headteacher.

For those children who are struggling to attend school full time due to their complex medical needs, school and the parents/carers may discuss flexible hours. When a parent seeks a reduction in hours or days, the school and health professionals will look at the individual child and their needs and work with the parents to provide appropriate education for their child in line with the document "Children who are too poorly to attend school". The child's needs will be the priority, rather than achieving full time attendance figures. Absence from school in these circumstances will be authorised.

Whilst any child may be off school because they are ill, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents and the child. If your 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 can give the impression that attendance does not matter and usually makes things worse.

Absence procedures:

If your child is absent you must:

- contact us as soon as possible on the first day of absence;
- Or, you can call into school and report to reception.

If your child is absent we will:

- Telephone you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you;
- Invite you in to discuss the situation with our Attendance Officer and/or Headteacher if absences persist;
- If appropriate, we will refer the matter to the Attendance Officer linked with school if attendance moves below 85% as per Local Authority protocol.

If your child has a prolonged absence due to medical reasons, we will:

- Keep in regular contact with the family;
- Follow procedures outlined in the document “Children who are too poorly to attend school.
- Provide educational activities at home/hospice/hospital if appropriate.

Child Missing From Education

In line with Keeping Children Safe in Education, we have a Safeguarding duty to ensure pupils are in school when they are meant to be. We have clear procedures in place in the event a child does not arrive at school and we can not get in touch with parents/carers.

- Class staff to complete the class register as soon as pupils arrive into class using the Class Mark programme on the iPad.
- Office staff to listen to absence calls on answer phone by 9am.
- Office staff to collate registers, lates, absence calls, any messages class staff have received and produce a list of children absent without an explanation.
- On the first day of absence, office staff to start calling parents from 9:20am to try and gain an explanation for absence. If no response, start calling all contacts on the data sheet until you get an answer. Leave messages if there is a voicemail option. Send a text message requesting parents to ring school ASAP as their child has not arrived at school.
- Call the contact list at least twice.
- If no reply from any contacts, speak to DSL and consider whether the family receive any additional agency support, e.g. social worker, and contact them. At this point DSL will take the lead.
- Any in school intelligence? Does anyone know the family?
- No explanation from a supportive family is very worrying so do not just concentrate on children who you already know to be vulnerable.
- Make a prompt home visit-ideally DSL with one other staff member.
- If you can not get an answer refer to CSC and police to request a welfare check.
- If you can see the children inside the house but parents are avoiding the knocking, do not refer unless you think the children are at risk of significant harm.

Telephone Numbers

There are times when we need to contact parents about lots of things, including absence, so we need to have your contact numbers at all times. So help us all to help you and your child by making sure we always have an up to date number-if we don't then something important may be missed. There will be regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

In line with Keeping Children Safe in Education, we must have names and numbers for at least 2 emergency contacts.

In school Strategies to Improve Attendance/Punctuality

Parents are expected to contact school at an early stage and to work with the staff in resolving any problems together. This is nearly always successful. School may consider using the following strategies to help support parents in improving their child's attendance and or/punctuality. This includes:

- Celebrating full attendance with pupils through certificates and awards;
- Meetings in school between parents, pupils, class staff, health professionals and headteacher;
- Recognising the needs of individual pupils when planning a return to school following significant periods of absence;
- Parenting contracts;
- Use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and/or referral to outside agencies (including the Local Authority Attendance Officer);
- Penalty notices.

The Local Authority Attendance officer:

If difficulties can not be sorted out using in-school strategies, the school may refer the child to the Attendance Officer from the Local Authority. He/she will also try to resolve the situation by agreement but, if other ways of trying to improve the child's attendance have failed, and unauthorised absences persist, these Officers can use sanctions such as Penalty Notices or prosecutions in the Magistrates Court. Full details of options open to enforce attendance at school are available from the School or the Local Authority.

Lateness:

Poor punctuality is not acceptable. If your child misses the start of the day they can miss work and do not spend time with their class teacher finding out what is happening that day. Late arriving pupils also disrupt lessons, which can be embarrassing for the child and can in turn, encourage absence. Being 10 minutes late every day throughout the academic year is the same as missing two weeks of school.

How do we manage lateness:

With the exception of children on reduced hours and some of our Early Years part time children, the school day starts at 8.50am and we will expect children to be arriving at this time.

Registers are marked by 9.20 am, and your child will receive a late mark if they are not in by that time.

At 9.30am the registers will be closed. In accordance with the Regulations, if your child arrives after that time they will receive a mark that shows them to be on site, but this will **not** count as a present mark and it will mean they have an unauthorised absence. This may mean that you could face the possibility of a Penalty Notice if the problem persists.

If your child has a persistent late record, you will be asked to meet with the Headteacher and/or a member of the pastoral team to resolve the problem, but you can approach us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to school on time.

Holidays in Term Time:

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 away in school time.

Remember that any savings you think you may make by taking a holiday in school time are offset by the cost to your child's education.

There is **no** automatic entitlement in law to time off in school time to go on holiday.

All applications for leave must be made in advance in writing and, at the discretion of the school, (a maximum of 10 days) in any academic year may be authorised but only in 'exceptional circumstances' – see appendix attached. In making a decision, the school will consider the circumstances of each application individually, including any previous pattern of leave in term time.

It is important that you understand the circumstances when leave in term time will **not** be agreed by us:

- When a pupil is just starting the school. This is very important as your child needs to settle into their new environment as quickly as possible.
- When a pupil's attendance record already includes any level of unauthorised absence.
- Where a pupil's attendance rate is already below 90% or will fall to or below that level as a result of taking holiday leave.

Any period of leave taken without the agreement of the school, or in excess of that agreed, will be classed as unauthorised and may attract sanctions such as a Penalty Notice.

Religious Absence:

The school will authorise one day 'leave' per religious festival e.g. Eid, but no more than 3 days in any one academic year. Parents must request this leave in advance.

Roles and responsibilities for attendance matters in our school:

Parents:

- Ensure children attend school regularly and punctually;
- Contact school on 1st day of absence;
- Avoid holidays in term time wherever possible and apply in advance in writing;
- Attendance at meetings in school;

- Participation in Parenting Contracts and Common Assessment Framework, and co-operate in support and interventions offered by school or other agencies;
- Ensure children go to bed on time;
- Ensure their child has their breakfast before coming to school.

Pupils:

- Acknowledge behaviour needed out of school e.g. early bedtime;
- Attend school/registration punctually;
- Speak to parents/teacher if issues arise that may have an effect on their school attendance.
- Co-operate and participate in interventions and support offered by the school or other agencies.

Headteacher/School Attendance Lead:

- Take the lead in ensuring attendance has a high profile within the school;
- Ensure there are designated staff with day-to-day responsibility for attendance matters;
- Ensure adequate protected time is allocated to discharge these responsibilities;
- Take overall responsibility for ensuring the school conforms to all statutory requirements in respect of attendance;
- Ensure there are designated staff to oversee educational provision for children who are too poorly to attend school (class teacher and Assistant Headteacher).

Designated Staff:

- First day response: Contact parents if a reason for absence has not been provided;
- Input and update the attendance registers;
- Regularly identify and monitor school attendance and punctuality levels;
- Work with children and parents to remove barriers to regular and punctual attendance following flowcharts 1 and 2 (see appendix) and using parenting contracts where appropriate.
- Ensure, if appropriate, children who are unable to attend school due to medical reasons have opportunities to access educational activities in line with the document "Children who are too poorly to attend school".

All staff:

- Provide a welcoming atmosphere for children and provide a safe learning environment;
- Ensure an appropriate and responsive curriculum;
- Provide a sympathetic response to any pupils' concerns;
- To be aware of factors that can contribute to non-attendance;
- To see pupil' attendance as the responsibility of **all** school staff;
- Participate in training regarding school systems and procedures.
- Be pro-active in providing learning opportunities for children who are too poorly to attend school.
- Recognise that poor attendance can be a Safeguarding concern.

Governors:

- Adopt the whole school policy and review regularly;
- Monitor the consistent implementation of the attendance policy;
- Agree statutory targets for the school;
- Be supportive of the high staffing levels required to:
 - i) support the return to school of a child who has been absent for a significant length of time due to medical reasons;
 - ii) ensure that appropriate learning opportunities can be delivered and reviewed for children who are too poorly to attend school.

School targets, projects and special initiatives:

The school has targets to improve attendance and your child has an important part to play in meeting these targets.

The minimum level of attendance for our school is 90%. We recognise that for some of our very poorly children, that this will be an aspiration. However, our target is to achieve better than this because we know that good attendance is the key to successful schooling and we believe our pupils can be amongst the best in a special school.

Through the school year, we monitor absences and punctuality to show us where improvements need to be made. We work very closely with families whose child has complex medical needs to ensure that learning continues, as appropriate, even if their child is too poorly to attend school.

Summary:

Our school has a legal duty to publish its absence figures to parents and to promote attendance. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend. All school staff are committed to working with parents and pupils, as this is the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible. For those children with extremely complex medical needs, we pride ourselves in being pro-active in supporting their attendance and education.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the document “Children who are too poorly to attend school”. This is available from the school office.

Date of policy: Autumn 2021

Date of policy review Autumn 2024

Appendix

Exceptional Circumstances – Criteria for determining authorisation for leave during term time

- Availability of specialist facilities.
- Accessibility of facilities at the quieter time in the year.
- Exceptional family circumstances e.g. family weddings abroad etc...
- Holidays funded through other sources e.g. charity.

Addendum to Pear Tree School Attendance Policy in the light of Covid-19

Academic Year 2021–22

Expectations of Attendance

In their published guidance, the Department for Education have clearly stated that:

- From the start of the autumn term 2021 attendance in school is mandatory and the usual rules on attendance apply
- Schools should now record attendance and follow up absence in the usual way
- The duty on parents to ensure the regular attendance of children of compulsory school age is no longer disapplied
- The ability to issue sanctions such as penalty notices is no longer disapplied

The school day

- Excellent punctuality is very important as the school day is structured to avoid mixing and to enable social distancing. Pupils arriving late may compromise the safe running of school.
- If pupils are regularly late, a senior member of staff will make contact with parents/carers to discuss the matter.
- The normal school hours are 8.50am to 3pm have been re-instated for all pupils.

The recording of attendance

Attendance registers will be marked as laid out in the DfE School Attendance Guidance and as detailed in our main Whole School Attendance Policy. During this academic year, there will be the use of an additional code X (as outlined in the DfE School Attendance Guidance Addendum). This will be used to record situations when pupils are not able to attend school due to:

- A positive lateral flow or PCR test
- For students aged 18 years and 6 months, if they have had close contact with someone with symptoms/confirmed positive Covid19 and told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace/Public Health
- Pupil is under a period of quarantine, e.g. following a relevant trip overseas.

In all the above cases, school will provide access to remote education.

*all pupils with coronavirus symptoms are advised to get a test.

If the test is negative and the pupil feels well enough, they can return to school.

If the test is positive, the pupil should self-isolate for at least 10 days from the onset of their symptoms. The absences following the positive test result will be marked as I (authorised absence).

The X code is not classed as an absence for statistical purposes.

What happens if my child develops symptoms when on site?

In this situation, we will make immediate contact with parents/carers in order to send the pupil home. It is **essential** that parents have provided us with up to date contact details and that parents respond quickly, to enable us to remove the pupil from site as soon as possible, following the latest DfE guidance for schools.

Parents/ carers should ensure that a test is requested and inform school of the result of this test as soon as possible.

School attendance framework and support to encourage good attendance

The school attendance framework remains as outlined in our main school attendance policy. In addition, during this time we have additional support for parents and pupils:

- A facebook film to demonstrate the changes within school
- A booklet for families to explain any new systems and changes

Leave requests

The school policy and procedure around leave in term time remains the same. Any leave in term time will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. Parent/carers must request permission for the leave **before** the absence. Requests cannot be agreed retrospectively.

Whilst the current situation feels exceptional to us all this should not in itself be seen as an exceptional reason to support a request for leave. The Covid-19 situation has affected all families. The lengthy absences from school were unavoidable but now we are able to return to face-to-face teaching, it is essential that we have full classes to enable pupils to continue to make progress in their learning.

Parents should also consider the consequences of potential quarantine on their child's attendance at school.

Policy review date: July 2024