

St. LAURENCE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL



Attendance Policy

*Through God's grace a community growing in knowledge and
understanding*

*Reviewed by Full Governing Body: 11th October 2018, following the
Cambridgeshire County Council Updated Penalty and Prosecution Notice
Code of Conduct*

Review Date: January 2020

Aims:

- To achieve a whole school attendance target of 96% or above
- To work closely with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) to monitor the attendance of children and respond to concerns about levels of absence promptly
- To encourage parents not to take their children out of school during term time.

Purpose:

St Laurence wants each and every child to have the best possible attendance at school to enable them to reach their full potential. There is a strong link between good school attendance and achieving good results for children. Children who frequently miss school may fall behind in their work which may affect their future prospects. Absence may also have an effect on friendships. At St Laurence School we work closely with families to support them to achieve the best possible outcomes for our children.

Promoting Good Attendance:

Good attendance will be celebrated on a weekly basis. Classes will compete for the highest attendance and receive a visit from the attendance mascot as a prize. Every half term we will focus on attendance during the celebration assembly. Pupils that have improved their attendance will receive a certificate. At the end of the year, all children achieving good and those with improving attendance during the course of the year will be recognised and celebrated.

Monitoring Attendance:*The Three Letter System:*

Introduction: The three-letter system is intended to enable schools to continuously and consistently monitor and address poor school attendance. The system offers schools the opportunity to target non-attendance methodically and progressively up to and including the point at which a referral to the Education Welfare Service may be necessary. The system is based on three model letters which schools can send to parents when there are concerns about any emerging patterns of absenteeism. It is intended to apply to absence which is unauthorised and also to target patterns of absence which are authorised but which are beginning to cause concern.

Key Features and Potential Benefits:

- Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher can focus on the attendance of all pupils at least once a fortnight.
- Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher can quickly and easily identify those pupils whose attendance is becoming a cause of concern.
- In most cases Letter 1 brings about a rapid improvement in attendance and no further action is required.
- The system provides a clear record of the school's own efforts to improve attendance should it subsequently be necessary to involve the Education Welfare Service.
- As the Education Welfare Service 'Information about the EWS' leaflet has been shared with all parents and placed on the website, parents have been made aware of the existence and role of the Education Welfare Service prior to any subsequent involvement should this prove necessary.

- The school can readily identify emerging attendance problems and therefore target support accordingly.
- The school builds up a consistent record of their own attendance interventions and is able to ensure that when they do need to involve the Education Welfare Service they do this only when their own efforts have proved unsuccessful.

The school produces a record of attendance every fortnight for all pupils and focusing on those whose attendance has fallen beneath 96%. These pupils are discussed fortnightly with the EWO, looking for emerging trends and patterns. Families are targeted by the Deputy Headteacher for support.

Letter 1: For those pupils who have been identified for the first time, a copy of Letter 1 (Appendix 1) is sent to the parents together with a copy of the Education Welfare Service 'Is your child at School Today?' leaflet. Should the pupil's attendance improve but the improvement fail to be sustained, a further copy of Letter 1 may be sent at a later date.

Letter 2 Medical: Following the sending of Letter 1, should the pupil's attendance fail to improve or should it fall to a lower level, a copy of Letter 2 Medical is sent to parents asking to provide medical evidence for any further absences. If this evidence is not provided absences will be marked as unauthorised. (Appendix 2).

Letter 2 Meeting: Following the sending of Letter 2 Medical, should the pupil's attendance fail to improve or should it fall to a lower level, or if the SLT have any concerns regarding a child's attendance, a copy of Letter 2 Meeting will be issued. This letter requests that Parents attend a meeting with the Deputy, to discuss the issues concerning attendance and to set targets to improve. There will then be a monitoring period of eight to twelve weeks to ensure there is an improvement.

Letter 3: Should the pupil's attendance still fail to improve after attendance targets have been set, or should it fall to a lower level, then a copy of Letter 3 (Appendix 3) is sent to the parents (and copied to the Education Welfare Officer). The case at this point can be formally referred to the Education Welfare Officer.

Should the pupil have been absent for three continuous days without a satisfactory explanation having been received, or should there be child protection or other immediate welfare concerns then the school may of course make an earlier referral to the Education Welfare Officer. Should the child be on the Child Protection Register, the child's social worker should be notified immediately.

Leave of Absence during Term Time:

Whilst it is acknowledged that for some parents the issue of choosing when to arrange annual family holidays may be problematic due to particular working patterns and particular restrictions on when leave can be taken in some occupations, the vast majority of parents should be able to arrange for their annual family holiday to take place within the published dates for school holidays.

It is recognised that some parents may persist in taking their children out of school for the purposes of a family holiday regardless of the view and response of their child's school. A child does not have a 'right' or 'entitlement' to term-time leave for the purposes of an annual family holiday and that term-time leave, like all leave, can only be authorised at the discretion of the Headteacher. Parents should understand that any request for leave of absence in term-time leave will be treated on an individual basis. Decisions to authorise absence will be based on individual family circumstances. The school will not, as a rule, agree to leave of absence during term time

unless there are exceptional circumstances (See Appendix 4 for what qualifies as exceptional circumstances). In all cases, absence will not be authorised unless the authorisation form has been completed and the Headteacher deems the circumstance to be exceptional. Exceptional circumstances will not include financial restraints and making use of holiday discounts.. A child's history of attendance will also be taken into account.

Suspected Holiday Protocol

If a child is absent from school and the school have grounds to suspect the child has gone on holiday a Suspected Holiday Letter will be issued. This letter will ask parents to provide evidence that the child was not on holiday within 5 days of receipt. If no evidence in forth coming a request for a penalty notice will be sent to the local authority.

Additional Guidance On Extended Visits Overseas:

We are aware in our school there are pupils whose families have work and family commitments abroad, the situation arises where visits are made overseas by these families for extended periods of more than two weeks. In making judgements about extended absence for such pupils, St Laurence will ensure that full account is taken not only of the regulations and the DfE guidance but also of the situation of minority ethnic families in general and the particular circumstances relating to each individual case. This guidance is intended to assist schools in making such judgements.

Recognition of the Issues:

St Laurence recognises the particular circumstances of ethnic minority parents when considering the issue of extended visits overseas. We will take account of the following:-

- a visit involving family overseas has an entirely different significance than the normal associations with 'holiday' which is a category recognised by the DfE
- visits may be very important in terms of children's identity and self-esteem as they grow up
- parents may feel that the reasons for their visit outweigh the importance of their child's uninterrupted attendance at school - maintaining family links (in extended family situations) may involve greater significance and greater pressures in some societies
- it is often very difficult for ethnic minority parents to make visits for such normal activities as maintaining family contacts, visiting sick relatives, bereavements, etc where large distances and high costs are involved.

School Response

- St Laurence will make clear to parents the likely educational impact upon their children if extended leave is taken during term-time. The importance of being at school near and during SATs will also be stressed.
- Should the school feel unable to comply with the request for leave the reasons for this will be explained to the parents. This explanation should show an understanding of the parents' perspective.

Fixed Penalty Fines or Prosecution

Penalty Notices will be issued in accordance with the terms within the Code of Conduct set out for Cambridgeshire. They will only be issued in relation to absence from school, which is unauthorised. At St Laurence, Penalty Notices will be issued to parents when their child's attendance meets one of the following criteria:

1. There is persistent unauthorised absence over a period of time such that the child's attendance rate is below 90%

2. **A parent takes a child out of school for term time leave (including a holiday) for 6 consecutive sessions (3 days) or more over a 4 week period, not authorised by the school (under exceptional circumstances rule)**

3. Attendance falls below 85% over the previous 4-week period. Before issuing a Penalty Notice, the school will deploy other strategies to help the family improve attendance rates. Such strategies might include:

- writing to the child's parents to remind them of their legal responsibilities
- meeting with the child's parents;
- first day absence phone calls;
- setting targets for improvement;
- referral to the Education Welfare Officer;
- involvement of other services/agencies i.e. Red Hen or the CB4 family worker

In the first instance, school would send a warning letter via the EWO (Appendix 4). If a family continue to take leave of absence without authorisation by the Headteacher, then a Penalty Notice Letter will be issued.

The fine for a Penalty Notice is £60 per parent, per child, if paid within 21 days. The fine rises to £120 per parent per child if paid after 21 days but within 28 days. If a Penalty Notice remains unpaid after 28 days, parents may be the subject of court proceedings for failing to ensure the regular school attendance of their child(ren), which could result in a fine of up to £2,500 and/or a term of imprisonment of up to 3 months (per parent). The tariff for these fines is set by the Local Authority.

If a family have had previous penalty notices issued or attendance has been an ongoing issue with no improvement the Local Authority may issue a request for a prosecution.



Policy Date: 5th October 2017

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT for SCHOOL POLICIES

		Yes / No	Comments
1.	Does the Policy/Guidance affect one group less or more favourably than another on the basis of:		
	• Age (for policies affecting staff)	N/A	
	• Disability	N	
	• Sex	N	
	• Gender reassignment	N	
	• Pregnancy/maternity	N	
	• Race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins)	N	
	• Sexual orientation	N	
	• Religion or belief	N	
	• Marriage / civil partnership	N	
2.	Is there any evidence that some groups are affected differently?	Y	The school recognises the particular circumstances of ethnic minority parents when considering the issue of extended visits overseas.
3.	If we have identified potential discrimination are any exceptions reasonable, legal and justifiable?	Y	The school takes account of the significance of overseas visits to family for ethnic minority families, eg for children's identity & self esteem, maintaining family links, visiting sick relatives, bereavements etc.
4.	Is the impact of the policy/guidance likely to be negative?	N	
5.	If so, can the impact be avoided?	N/A	
6.	What alternatives are there to achieving the policy/guidance without the impact?	N/A	
7.	Can we reduce the impact by taking different action?	N/A	

Equality Impact Assessment carried out by: Full Governing Body

Date: 27th January 2017, reviewed 5th October 2017

Signed by Chair of Governors:

MJ O'Sullivan

Appendix 1

St. Laurence Catholic Primary



Date

Attendance Letter 1

Dear Parents,

I am writing to advise you that within the last six weeks, XXX school attendance has fallen to 96%, it is expected by our Education Welfare Officer to be at least 98%. As a result there is a risk that XXX is missing a significant part of his/her learning.

Regular attendance is extremely important as missing school can impact on learning, and as you are aware it is a legal requirement. Good attendance enables students to keep up with the work required.

I will continue to monitor XXX's attendance and I look forward to seeing an improvement. If there are any particular circumstances that the school may not be aware of which is having an influence on XXX attending school regularly, please do not hesitate to contact me so that we can support you in improving your child's attendance.

Yours Sincerely,

Mrs V Harvey

Appendix 2

St. Laurence Catholic Primary



Date

Attendance Letter 2

Dear Parent,

The Education Welfare Officer, Milly Archer, was in school this week to monitor our attendance records. We are concerned that XXX's attendance has continued to fall to 94%.

It is important that XXX maintains regular school attendance as any absence may interrupt her academic progress and may have effect on maintaining classroom relationships. Regular attendance is a legal requirement and is monitored externally by our Education Welfare Officer.

In order to support you improve your child's attendance, we would like to invite you to a meeting with myself. During this meeting we will discuss your issues with attendance and provide you with strategies for improvement. Along with yourself we will set targets to ensure XXX's attendance improves. Please contact the school office to arrange a convenient time this week.

While XXX's attendance continues to be below 96% the Education Welfare Officer has advised the school that we are unable to use the absence code for illness, without medical evidence. If no evidence is available the absence will be recorded as unauthorised. Examples of evidence include copies of confirmation of the Doctor's appointment, prescriptions and/or appointment cards.

We look forward to seeing you and feel confident that by working together this issued and can be resolved.

Yours Sincerely,

Mrs Harvey
Deputy Head Pastoral

Appendix 3

St. Laurence Catholic Primary



Date

Attendance Letter 3

Dear Parents,

I note that there has been no significant improvement in XXXXX's attendance since <date>. XXXXXX's attendance for this academic year has fallen to...%.

Disappointingly, I have not received a satisfactory explanation for XXXXXX's absences. Therefore it has now become necessary to refer XXXXXX and the concerns around their attendance to the Education Welfare Service.

XXXXXXXX, our Education Welfare Officer, will contact you in due course. Should you have anything you wish to discuss concerning this matter, I will continue to be available as we want to work in partnership with you to improve your child's attendance. Please contact me on the above number should you require an appointment.

Yours sincerely

Mrs C Clark
Headteacher

Appendix 4



ADVICE & GUIDANCE

Guidance on authorised absence in schools

There is some debate about what 'exceptional circumstances' means when deciding whether to grant absence for students during term time. We believe it is valuable to have some guiding principles to back schools in their decisions and provide consistency. This guidance has no statutory authority and is not imposed upon schools.

1. The decision to authorise absence is at the head teacher's discretion based on their assessment of the situation. Circumstances vary from school to school and so there can be no absolute rules on this subject.
2. Term times are for education. This is the priority. Children and families have 175 days off school to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. Heads will rightly prioritise attendance. The default school policy should be that absences will not be granted during term time and will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.
3. If an event can reasonably be scheduled outside of term time then it would not be normal to authorise absence.
4. Absence during term time for holidays/vacations is therefore not considered an exceptional circumstance.
5. Absences to visit family members are also not normally granted during term time if they could be scheduled for holiday periods or outside school hours. Children may however need time to visit seriously ill relatives.
6. Absence for a bereavement of a close family member is usually considered an exceptional circumstance but for the funeral service only, not extended leave.
7. Absences for important religious observances are often taken into account but only for the ceremony and travelling time, not extended leave. This is intended for one off situations rather than regular or recurring events.
8. Schools may wish to take the needs of the families of service personnel into account if they are returning from long operational tours that prevent contact during scheduled holiday time.
9. Schools have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for students with special educational needs or disabilities.
10. Families may need time together to recover from trauma or crisis.



11. It is acceptable to take a student's previous record of attendance into account when making decisions.
12. It is important to note that head teachers can determine the length of the authorised absence as well as whether absence is authorised at all.

Any examples provided are illustrative rather than exhaustive. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short. And by 'unavoidable' we mean an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time.

Background

The education (pupil registration) (England) (amendment) regulations 2013, which came into force on 1 September 2013, removed references to family holidays and extended leave as well as the notional threshold of ten school days. The amendments made clear that head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless 'exceptional circumstances' exist. The regulations also stated that head teachers should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if leave is granted for 'exceptional circumstances'.

The DfE advice on school attendance (November 2013) should also be considered and read in conjunction with the 2013 regulations.

We believe the guidelines in this document to be compatible with the above policy. They clarify the definition of external circumstances; they do not change it.

Ofsted have confirmed that their focus is on whether recurrent absence is being addressed; only if there is an issue with this will they look more deeply into why the school has authorised absence. Concern about inspection should not govern schools' decisions in this area. Head teachers are under pressure to meet overall absence thresholds however.

Variations to term time

Where schools serve communities whose patterns of work create a regular barrier to attendance and family life schools could consider changes to term times. Where this involves changes to compulsory terms, we strongly recommend this is co-ordinated across schools and local authorities in an area.

Some schools have adopted flexible term patterns, with the same overall number of days of study but some discretion to families under certain conditions.