

Attendance Policy



The Downley School

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Attendance Policy

1. Introduction

Regular school attendance is essential if children are to achieve their full potential.

The Downley School believes that regular school attendance is the key to enabling children to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who are able to realise their full potential and make a positive contribution to their community.

The Downley School values all pupils. As set out in this policy, we will work with families to identify the reasons for poor attendance and try to resolve any difficulties.

The Downley School recognises that attendance is a matter for the whole school community. Our Attendance Policy should not be viewed in isolation; it is a strand that runs through all aspects of school improvement, supported by our policies on safeguarding, bullying and inclusive learning. The policy also takes into account the Human Rights Act 1995 and the Race Relations Act 2000.

2. Legal Framework

Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act states that parents must ensure that children of compulsory school age receive efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

A child ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June of the school year in which they reach the age of 16.

Under the Education Act 1996, the Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that parents secure education for children of compulsory school age and where necessary, use legal enforcement.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2016 require schools to take an attendance register twice a day. At The Downley School this is done once at the start of the morning session and then again at the start of the afternoon session.

The register must record whether the pupil was:

- present;
- absent;
- present at approved educational activity, or
- unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

3. Categorising Absence

Where pupils of compulsory school age are recorded as absent, the register must show whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Absence can only be authorised by the school and cannot be authorised by parents. All absences will be treated as unauthorised unless a satisfactory explanation for the pupil's absence has been received.

Parents should advise the school of the reason for the child's absence via the school absence line or email to school office. Parents may be asked to provide medical

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evidence where there are repeated absences. Absence will be categorised as follows:

Illness

In most cases a message via the absence line or email to the school office from the parent informing the school that their child is ill will be acceptable. Parents may be asked to provide medical evidence where there are repeated absences due to reported illness. This will usually be in the form of an appointment card, prescription etc.

Medical/Dental Appointments

Parents are advised where possible to make medical and dental appointments outside the school day. Where this is not possible, children should attend school for part of the day. Parents should complete a leave of absence form and provide evidence of the medical appointment where possible.

Excluded (no alternative provision made)

Exclusion from school is counted as an authorised absence. The children's class teacher will make arrangements for work to be sent home.

Punctuality

- At The Downley School, whenever possible, every day begins with Wake and Shake on the lower playground or the daily mile.
- A Bell sounds at 8.40 a.m. which is a signal for the children to take their place. It is also a signal for the parents to leave the playground. Staff meet and greet the children and everyone takes part together.
- The main gates are shut promptly at 8.50 a.m. by which time all parents need to have left.
- It is important to be on time as the first few minutes of the school day are often used to give out instructions or organise schoolwork for the rest of the day.

Lateness

- All children arriving after 8.50 a.m. **must be accompanied to the school Reception by the parent/carer**, where they will be asked to sign them in and provide a reason for lateness.
- Lateness is monitored regularly. Where children have persistent lateness problems the parents will receive notification that their child's attendance is being monitored and if no improvement is noted a meeting is requested with the school Family Worker.

Registration

Begins in classes at 9 a.m. Pupils arriving after this time but before the register closes, will be marked as present but having arrived later. The register closes at 9.20 a.m. Pupils arriving after the close of the register will be recorded as absent. This will not be authorised and will count as an absence for that session.

The absence will only be authorised if a satisfactory explanation for the late arrival can be provided, for example, attendance at a medical appointment (Code M)

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The absence will be recorded as unauthorised if the pupil has arrived late after the register closes without justifiable cause, for example, if they woke up late, was tired and allowed to sleep in or were waiting for their uniform to dry. (Code U)

Unauthorised absence

Absence will not be authorised unless parents have provided a satisfactory explanation that has been accepted as such by the school.

Examples of unsatisfactory explanations include:

- A pupil's/family member's birthday
- Shopping for uniform
- Having their hair cut
- Closure of a sibling's school for INSET (or other) purposes
- "Couldn't get up"
- Holidays taken without the authorisation of school
- A pupil's parents/guardians saying they are ill

Leave of Absence and Extended Leave

Parents do not have an automatic right to remove their child from school during term time for the purpose of a holiday and are strongly advised not to do so. Parents should be aware that if their child is absent for 10 school days they will miss 5% of their education during that academic year.

Parents wishing to take their child out of school during term time must send a written request to the Headteacher, in the form of a Leave of Absence Request form before arrangements are made. Documentary evidence of leave and return dates may be required in order to process the request. Retrospective requests will not be considered and therefore will result in the absence being categorised as unauthorised. Each request will be considered individually but it should be noted that the Headteacher may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.

All requests for leave of absence will receive a written response. When a request has been granted, the letter/email will state:

- The expected date of return
- That parents should contact school if any delay should occur

If the permission to take leave is not granted and the pupil is absent, the absence will be unauthorised. In such cases the school may refer the matter to the Education Welfare Service who may issue a Penalty Notice.

Religious Observance

The Downley School acknowledges the multi faith nature of British society and recognises that on some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside school holiday periods or weekends and that this necessitates a consideration of authorised absence or special leave for religious observance. (Code R)

It is reasonable for a parent to allow their child(ren) not to attend school on any day of religious observance if recognised by the parent's religious body.

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Parents are requested to give advance notice to the school if they intend their child to be absent.

However, in the interests of fulfilling the academic requirements of the school and limiting the authorised absence rate of the school, it is identified as reasonable that no more than one day be designated for any individual occasion of religious observance/festival and no more than three days in total in any academic year. Absence in excess of this will be categorised as unauthorised.

Traveller Absence

The aim for the attendance of Traveller children, in common with all children is to attend school as regularly and as frequently as possible.

To protect Traveller parents from unreasonable prosecution for non-attendance, the Education Act 1944, section 86, states that a Traveller parent is safe from prosecution if their child accrues 200 attendances (i.e. 200 half days) in a year. Traveller absence (Code T) is acceptable only when the family is engaged in trade or business that requires them to travel and when the child is attending school as regularly as that trade permits.

It does not mean that part-time education for Traveller children is legally acceptable, nor does it relieve parents of their duties to ensure that their children are receiving suitable education when not at school.

When in or around Buckinghamshire, if a Traveller family can reasonably travel back to their base school (see below) then the expectation is that their child will attend full-time.

The Downley School will be regarded as the base school if it is the school where the child normally attends when they are not travelling. However, the pupil must have attended in the last 18 months. Traveller children can register at other schools temporarily whilst away from their base school. In such cases, the pupil's school place at The Downley School will be kept open for them whilst travelling. This is to protect them from unfairly losing their place at their school of usual attendance.

The Downley School can operate effectively as the child's base school only if we are engaged in an ongoing dialogue with Traveller families. This means that parents must:

- Advise of the forthcoming travelling patterns before they happen; and
- Inform the school regarding proposed return dates

The Downley School will authorise absence of Traveller children if we are satisfied that a family is travelling and has given indication that they intend to return.

Traveller children will be recorded as attending an approved educational activity when;

- The child is on roll and attending another visited school#
- Undertaking supervised educational activity under the jurisdiction of another Local Authority Traveller Education Service
- The child is undertaking computer based distance learning that is time evidenced.

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- Where Traveller children are registered pupils at a school and are known to be present either at site (official or otherwise) or in a house and are not attending school, the absence will be investigated in the same way as for any other pupil.

4. Deletions from the Register

In accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2016, pupils will be deleted from the register only when one of the following circumstances applies (and the LA must be notified):

- The child has ceased to attend and is to be home educated
- Has moved out of the area
- Has been certified as medically unable to continue attending
- Is detained under a court order
- Has been permanently excluded
- Pupil stops attending school named in school attendance order
- Pupil stops attending one school while registered at two schools
- Pupil has not returned for 10 days after authorised absence, is not believed to be unwell, and neither the school nor the local authority knows where the child is (school and LA are expected to investigate)
- Pupil has been absent from school for 20 days (continuous) without authorisation
- Pupil has died
- The pupil has ceased to be of compulsory school age

The Downley School will follow Buckinghamshire County Council's Children Missing Education Protocol when a pupils' whereabouts is unknown.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The Downley School believes that improved school attendance can only be achieved if it is viewed as a shared responsibility of the school staff, governors, parents, pupils and the wider school community.

The Downley School will:

- Actively promote the importance and value of good attendance to pupils and their parents
- Form positive relationships with pupils and parents
- Contribute to a whole school approach which reinforces good school attendance; with good teaching and learning experiences that encourage all pupils to attend and achieve
- Comply with the Education Regulations, England 2016 and other attendance related regulations
- Implement systems to report, record and monitor the attendance of all pupils, including those who are educated off-site
- Analyse attendance data to identify causes and patterns of absence
- Contribute to the evaluation of school strategies and interventions
- Work with other agencies to improve attendance and support pupils and their families

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- Document interventions used to a standard required by the Local Authority should legal proceedings be instigated

Requests that Parents will:

- Talk to their child about school and what goes on there. Take a positive interest in their child's work and educational progress
- Instil the value of education and regular school attendance within the home environment
- Encourage their child to look to the future and have aspirations
- Contact the school every day their child is absent, either via the absence line, school email or in person to let them know the reason why and the expected date of return. Verbal notification to be followed up with an email or letter where possible.
- Try to avoid unnecessary absences. Wherever possible, make appointments for the doctor, dentist, etc. outside of school hours
- Ask the school for help if their child is experiencing difficulties
- Inform the school of any change in circumstances that may impact on their child's attendance
- Support the school; take every opportunity to get involved in their child's education, form a positive relationship with school and acknowledge the importance of children receiving the same messages from both home and school
- Encourage routine at home, for example, bed times, homework, preparing school bag and uniform the evening before
- Not keep their child away from school to go shopping, to help at home or to look after other members of the family
- Avoid taking their child on holiday during term-time. Where this unavoidable, send a written leave request to the Headteacher in advance of booking the holiday.

6. Using Attendance Data

All pupils' attendance will be monitored and will be shared with the Local Authority and other agencies if a pupil's attendance is of concern.

At the beginning of each half term/term the Attendance Administrator/Manager will provide the Headteacher with attendance data for the previous half term for every pupil within the school. The list will be presented in numerical descending order with the highest attendees at the top.

Pupil attendance is reported to parents termly using a traffic light system below.

Red – Danger Zone - Below 90%

Amber – At Risk Zone – 90% – 94%

Green – Safety Zone – 95%-100%

This pupil data will be used to trigger school action as set out in the escalation of intervention (Appendix 1).

Attendance data will also be used to identify emerging patterns and trends to inform whole school strategies to improve attendance and attainment.

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The Downley School will share attendance data with the Local Authority as required. All information shared will be done so in accordance with the GDPR 2018 and Data Protection Act 1998.

7. Support Systems

The Downley School recognises that poor attendance is often an indication of difficulties in a child's life. This may be related to problems at home and or in school. Parents should make school aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance and/or behaviour in school, for example, bereavement, divorce/separation. This will help the school identify any additional support that may be required.

The Downley School also recognises that some pupils are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance, for example, those with additional educational needs, those with physical or mental health needs, migrant and refugee pupils and children looked after.

The school will implement a range of strategies to support improved attendance. Strategies used will include:

- Discussion with pupils and parents
- Attendance report cards
- Referrals to support strategies
- Learning mentors
- Friendship groups
- Reward systems
- Time limited part time time-tables
- Additional learning support
- Behaviour support
- Inclusion units
- Reintegration support packages

Support offered to families will be child centred and planned in discussion and agreement with both pupils and parents.

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Appendix 1

Intervention

Flow Chart

School will notify parent of the child's irregular school attendance and offer them the opportunity and support to improve.

If you receive a letter informing you of concerns regarding your child's attendance you should:

- Speak with your child to see if there are any reasons why they are reluctant to attend
- Contact the school Family Worker to discuss any difficulties you or your child may be experiencing
- Ensure your child attends school regularly

If there is no improvement and the parents has not provided a good reason for the absence, the school may refer to the County Attendance Team.

The County Attendance Team will invite you to attend a Parenting Contract Meeting and may issue a Warning of Penalty Notice.

A Parenting Contract is a voluntary agreement between you and the Local Authority aimed at supporting you in improving your child's school attendance.

Whilst your involvement in a Parenting Contract is voluntary. If you fail to engage with the support offered and your child's attendance remains irregular, the County Attendance team may issue a Penalty Notice or begin legal proceedings in the Magistrates Court.

If you are issued with a Penalty Notice of £60.00 per parent/carer, per child this must be paid in full within 21 days otherwise the Penalty will increase to £120 per parent/carer, per child. If you fail to pay the Penalty by the 28th day, the Education Welfare Service may instigate legal proceedings against you.

If you are found guilty of this offence you can be fined up to £2500 and/or be imprisoned for a period of three months.

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Legal Sanctions

Where intervention fails to bring about improvement in attendance, School will notify the County Attendance Team of the irregular attendance.

The County Attendance Team or school, may invite parents to attend a Parenting Contract Meeting and issue a formal warning of a Penalty Notice.

Parenting Contracts (Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003)

A Parenting contract is a voluntary agreement between the Local Authority, school and the parent. It can be extended to include the child and any other agencies offering support to resolve any difficulties leading to improved attendance.

The contract will outline attendance targets and will detail agreed actions that will help to achieve the target. The contract will be reviewed regularly.

The contract can be used as evidence in a prosecution should irregular attendance continue.

Penalty Notices (Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003)

Penalty Notices will be considered when:-

- Intervention has failed to bring about improvement and further unauthorised absence has occurred following written warning to improve.
- A pupil has taken leave of absence i.e. for the purpose of a holiday in term time and the absence has not been authorised by the school.

A Penalty Notice gives the parent the opportunity to avoid a prosecution. A £60 fine per parent/carer, per child must be paid within 21 days. The fine increases to £120 per parent/carer, per child if paid after 21 days but within 28 days of the date, the Notice was issued.

Failure to pay the Penalty Notice may result in a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

Prosecution: The school will provide the Local Authority with evidence required for a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996. This is to ensure that parents realise their own responsibilities in ensuring attendance at school and most importantly about returning children to education.