

Simonside Primary School Attendance Policy



Policy Originator: Emma Hills

Next review Date: September 2020 (review cycle annual)

Named personnel with designated responsibility for Attendance:

Head Teacher	Deputy Headteacher	Attendance Officer	Chair of Governors
Mrs Louise Thompson	Mrs Emma Hills	Miss Helen Jordan	Mrs Lynn Rae

1. Rationale

School education lays the vital foundations of a child's life. Research clearly demonstrates the link between regular attendance and educational progress and attainment. Simonside Primary school fully recognises its responsibilities to ensure pupils are in school and on time, therefore having access to learning for the maximum number of days and hours.

Our policy applies to all children registered at this school and this policy is made available to all parents/carers of pupils who are registered at our school on our school website, or is available from the school office for those without access to the internet.

This policy has been written to adhere to the relevant Children Acts, Education Acts, Regulations and Guidance from the Department of Education, in addition to guidance from the Local Authority.

Although parents/carers have the legal responsibility for ensuring their child's good attendance, the Head teacher and Governors at our school work together with other professionals and agencies to ensure that all pupils are encouraged and supported to develop good attendance habits. Procedures in this policy are followed to ensure this happens.

Children who are persistently late or absent soon fall behind with their learning. Children who are absent from school frequently develop large gaps in their learning which will impact on their progress and their ability to meet age related learning expectations. A child whose attendance drops to 90% each year will, over their time at primary school, have missed two whole terms of learning.

2. Aims and Objectives

This attendance policy ensures that all staff and governors in our school are fully aware of and clear about the actions necessary to promote good attendance.

As a school we aim to:

- Improve pupils' achievement by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality
- Ensure attendance is 97% or above, apart from for those with chronic health issues
- Support pupils and their parents/carers in the establishment of the highest possible levels of attendance and punctuality
- Ensure that all pupils have full and equal access to the best education that we can offer in order to maximise learning
- Enable pupils to progress smoothly, confidently and with continuity through the school
- Make parents/carers aware of their legal responsibilities and of the importance of uninterrupted attendance and punctuality at every stage of a child's education
- Create an ethos in which good attendance and punctuality are recognised as the norm and seen to be valued by the school
- Ensure that our policy applies to Nursery and Reception aged children in order to promote good habits at an early age
- Work in partnership with pupils, parents and staff and the Attendance Service so that all pupils realise their potential, unhindered by unnecessary absence
- Establish a pattern of monitoring attendance and ensure consistency in recognising achievement and dealing with difficulties
- Recognise the key role of all staff in promoting good attendance
- Recognise the role of class teachers as they will be able to identify where attendance is having an impact on attainment

Simonside Primary school maintains and promotes 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 attends regularly and punctually
- Equipping children with the life skills needed to take responsibility for good school attendance and punctuality appropriate to the child's age and development
- Maintaining effective means of 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 school which are preventing good attendance
- Developing and implementing procedures to follow up non-attendance at school

3. Procedures

Our school will undertake to follow 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 school
- To inform parents/carers what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absence
- To strongly discourage unnecessary absence through holidays taken during term time
- To work with parents to improve individual pupils' attendance and punctuality
- To refer to the Attendance Service or appropriate agencies any child whose attendance causes concern and where parents/carers have not responded to school initiatives to improve
- To report attendance statistics to the Local Authority and the DfE where requested
- All staff should be aware that they must raise any attendance or punctuality concerns to the nominated person with responsibility for monitoring attendance

4. Responsibilities

All members of school 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.

Class teachers are responsible for:

- Being active in their approach to promoting good attendance to pupils and their parents, which includes forming positive relationships with families
- Ensuring that the school's teaching and learning experiences encourage regular attendance and that pupils are taught the value of high attendance for their own personal progression and achievement
- Maintaining class registers and completing them accurately in accordance with school policy and forwarding completed registers to school office staff after registration closes
- Informing the nominated person where there are concerns and acting upon them
- Where poor attendance re occurs ensuring appropriate school staff are informed

- Contributing to strategy meetings and interventions with additional information provided by the child

The Head teacher is responsible for:

- Overall monitoring of school attendance
- Monitoring trends in authorised/unauthorised absence
- Contacting families where concerns are raised about absence, including arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised
- Making referrals to the Attendance Service
- Providing report and background information to inform discussion with the school's Attendance Officer
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence

Staff in the school office are responsible for:

- Collating and recording registration and attendance information
- Taking and recording messages from parents regarding absence
- Recording details of children who arrive late or go home early
- 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 and reporting concerns to the Head teacher
- Sending out standard letters regarding attendance
- First Day Response: Contacting home if no reasons for absence is received (phone call or text message)

PSA/Attendance Officer are responsible for:

At Simonside Primary school we have employed a PSA and an Attendance Officer to offer additional support to parents, carers and pupils. This includes support in relation to:

- Improving school attendance by carrying out home visits, attending meetings with the parent/carer
- Identifying with parents the reasons for poor attendance and working with parents to achieve improved attendance and reduce exclusions
- Monitoring attendance levels and punctuality
- Offering parent contracts
- Identifying patterns of absence
- Talking to pupils on a 1:1 basis regarding attendance related matters
- Offering group work sessions to remove the barriers to attendance including friendship groups

- Referring to outside agencies for additional support for families including School Health, CYPS, Attendance Service, Bridges School, Police and Social Care

Parents/Carers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually unless prevented from doing so by illness or attendance at a medical appointment
- Contacting the school office on the first morning of absence
- Informing the school in advance of any medical appointments in school time. For the absence to be recorded as a medical absence we do require evidence from the doctor or dentist
- Making requests for authorised absence in term time (only if absolutely necessary as these are not automatically authorised)
- Talking to the school as soon as possible about any child's reluctance to come to school so that problems can be quickly identified and dealt with

The Governing Body is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the importance of attendance is made clear by promoting the relevant school policies and guidance directed at parents and staff
- Annually reviewing the school's attendance rules and ensuring that all provisions are in place to allow school staff, parents and children to implement the rules effectively
- Nominating a member of the governing body who will take the lead role in monitoring attendance and coordinating provision and policies for attendance
- Ensuring that all legislation regarding attendance is complied with and that up-to-date guidelines are communicated to parents, children and staff
- Taking time at governors' meetings to regularly review and discuss attendance issues that have arisen in order to stay on top of expected attendance targets for the year
- Ensuring that the school is implementing effective means of recording attendance and organising that data, including for children who are educated off-site

5. Authorised and Unauthorised Absences

The school has, by law, to classify every absence mark a child has as either 'authorised' or 'unauthorised'. Schools have a duty to monitor every child's attendance and take swift action when attendance falls below the expected standard. An absence is classified as authorised when a child has been away from school for a legitimate reason and the school has received notification from a parent or carer. 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.

Authorised Absences

- ✓ Illness
- ✓ Medical/Dental (where a hospital letter or appointment card has been seen)
- ✓ Bereavement
- ✓ Agreed special occasion or exceptional circumstances
- ✓ Religious observance
- ✓ Approved sporting activity

Unauthorised Absences

This type of absence is not permitted by law. School cannot authorise absences for:

- ✗ Going to the shops or hairdressers
- ✗ Going on holidays
- ✗ Visiting relatives
- ✗ Children not wanting to come to school
- ✗ Staying off because a sibling is off poorly
- ✗ Birthdays
- ✗ Waiting for a delivery
- ✗ Oversleeping because of a late night
- ✗ Getting up late and not wanting to come into school for that day
- ✗ Keeping your child off because you are ill
- ✗ Appointments for other family members

Illness

We know that young children can be susceptible to illness and understand that if they are poorly they may need time off to recover. This is reflected in our school target for every child to have at least 97% attendance.

When children have an illness that means they will be away from school long term, the school will do all it can to send material home, so that they can keep up with their school work.

If the absence is likely to continue for an extended period, or be a repetitive absence, the school will contact the support services (Bridges Hospital Teaching – Newcastle LA) to see if arrangements can be made for the child to be given some home tuition outside school.

Where over the course of an academic year, a child has repeated periods of illness, the school will write to parents to ask them to provide medical evidence for each future period of illness related absence. This evidence should be a doctor's note, appointment card/letter or copy of a prescription. We may seek written permission from parents for the school to make their own enquiries. Alternatively we may make a referral to the School Health Advisor to offer support.

In all cases of absence parents should:

- Only keep their child away from school if really necessary
- Telephone school on the first day of absence. If no contact has been made by 9.30am from parents/carer, school will phone. If contact can still not be made, the information will be passed onto our Parent Support Officer or Attendance Officer who may come and visit children's homes to investigate why they are not in
- Keep school informed if more than one day's absence is necessary
- Avoid medical appointments in school time but, if absolutely necessary, bring their child to school before and/or after the appointment
- Speak to the class teacher who will be able to provide parents with work for their child if appropriate

Registers, Punctuality and Lateness

Punctuality is crucial. Lateness into school causes disruption to that individual's learning and to that of the other pupils in the class. It is paramount therefore that all pupils arrive at school on time at 8.55am. Learning starts as soon as the child walks into their classroom. Being late is extremely detrimental to their learning.

Registers are legal documents and will be marked twice a day.

All the school doors open at 8:50am and teaching starts at 8:55am. Registration takes place as soon as the children come into class. Any child arriving after 9:00am will receive a late mark (attendance code L on the electronic register) and the number of minutes late is recorded. Any children who are late must report to the main reception and report to Miss Monaghan to receive their mark and give the reason why they are late. Any child arriving after 9:30am will have their late arrival classed as an unauthorised absence. Afternoon registers are taken at 12:50pm for KS1 and 1:15pm for KS2.

All attendance records are documented using SIMS software, which is supported by the Local Authority. Attendance registers are legal documents and these must be kept secure and preserved for a period of three years after the date they were last used.

Repeated absence at the beginning of a school session can amount to failure to attend regularly for the purpose of the 1996 Education Act. The school seeks to improve general punctuality and to improve attitudes of persistent offenders by:

- Informing parents of our expectations and offer ways of helping combat lateness
- Contacting parents of persistent offenders and reporting to the Attendance Officer if no improvement. Parents/carers will receive a letter advising them of the concerns and the school will provide opportunities for parents/carers to seek support and advice to address these issues
- Praising and acknowledging latecomers who improve
- Ensuring that all children and parents understand that lateness is actively discouraged, although sensitivity may be appropriate in some cases

- Putting in place school incentives (e.g. Dojo points and class attendance rewards) to improve levels of punctuality.
- Utilising the role of the PSA to support pupils and families with any of the above issues

Children who have attended a dentist or doctor's appointment and subsequently come to school later than 8:55am will have the absence recorded as a medical absence (Attendance code M).

Reintegrating Long Term Absentees

Following a long period of absence, a child may feel vulnerable so staff may wish to arrange a phased or gradual return. Staff will consider whether Special Needs support is appropriate, ensure that all staff are aware of the situation and nominate a key person to monitor the child's reintegration into school. All children must feel welcomed back and know from whom they can seek help. Never leave children sitting in corridors or outside an office for long periods.

Home Time

We also record details of any pupils who are collected from school before 3:15pm (reason, number of minutes absent from school and whether an appointment card/letter has been seen). If the reason is not connected to an appointment, or an appointment card/letter is not seen by a member of staff, the minutes absent from school are recorded as unauthorised.

If a parent/carer turns up without prior warning and asks to collect their child early we would need to see the medical letter or appointment card. If no paperwork is available there is a form called 'Request to collect my child early from school' which the parent will be asked to complete. This is to ensure we have a recorded reason for the early collection. The confirmed reason will determine as to whether the minutes absent are recorded as authorised or not.

All children should be collected promptly at the end of the day. Exceptions to this are:

- Parents who have given permission for their child to walk home
- Children going to an after-school club
- Children who are booked to attend Cuba Kids

If a child is not collected by 3:30pm and we have not been informed by a parent/carer of any reason for this, a referral may be made to social services.

Holidays

Holidays should not be taken during term time. From September 2019, the Governing Body will be notifying the Local Authority Attendance Service about any pupil taking holidays in term time. This may result in the issuing of a Fixed Penalty Notice. The policy is in line with Newcastle LA.

Such a penalty is issued to each parent for each child taken out of school. A Penalty Notice is a fine of £60 if paid within the first 21 days which increases to £120 if paid between 22 and 28 days. Thereafter, if the Penalty remains unpaid this may lead to prosecution through the Magistrates Court.

If parents would like their child to have time off school for any reason- including holidays and medical appointments- they are required to:

- Collect a form (Application for Leave of Absence) from the school office BEFORE the absence
- Complete the form with as much information as they can about why they want to take their child out of school and return it to school

Medical/Dental Appointments should be supported by evidence i.e. appointment card/hospital letter.

Parents are advised that we always look at every case individually and take into account their child's attendance record over the previous year before making a decision about whether the absence will be authorised or not. Mrs Thompson may want to talk to them about it before making a decision. If leave is taken without prior authorisation by the school, it will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

Absences

Parents/carers should contact the school on the first day of their child's absence. It is important that full and accurate details of the reason for absence are provided and an expected date of return is given. This information is used to determine whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

First Day Contact

Where a child is absent from school and we have not received any verbal or written communication from the parent, then we initiate a first day contact process. Office staff check all of the registers between 9:00am and 9:30am on a daily basis, to identify those pupils who are absent. If contact cannot be made by phone or text, then the PSA or Attendance Officer will undertake a home visit.

6. Legislation

The law makes parents and carers responsible for ensuring that their children of compulsory school age (5 to 16) receive a suitable, full time education (Section 7, Education Act 1996).

Schools and the local authority monitor school absence and work with families and young people where the level of absence is causing concern.

The Local Authority may take legal action against parents/carers if their children do not attend regularly and if the absences are not authorised by the school (Section 444, Education Act 1996).

Prosecution under Section 444(1), Education Act 1996:

- 'If a child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, his parent is guilty of an offence'

There are two offences relating to parental responsibility for ensuring regular attendance at school or alternative provision:

- 1) If a registered pupil is absent without authorization then the parent is guilty of an offence under Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996. A conviction for this offence can result in a fine of up to £1000
- 2) If the parent knows that their child is failing to attend regularly at the school and fails to cause him to do so, he is guilty of an offence under Section 444(1A) of the Education Act 1996. This is known as an aggravated offence. A conviction for this offence may result in a substantial fine up to a maximum of £2500 and/or a term of imprisonment not exceeding 3 months and/or a community penalty

Legal Monitoring

The school expects attendance of at least 97%. It is important for children to establish good attendance habits early on in their primary school career. It is the responsibility of the Head Teacher and the governors to support good attendance and to identify and address attendance concerns promptly. Initially, concerns about attendance are raised with parents via letters which are sent home and parents may be offered a parent contract. A parent contract is an agreement/action plan which looks at ways to work together to improve attendance. There will be opportunities for the parent/carer to discuss reasons for absence and support to be given by the school with the aim to improve attendance. Where a child's attendance record does not improve over a period of time then the school has a responsibility to make a referral to the LA Attendance Service.

The Attendance Service will look at each case and may issue fixed penalty notices to parents where there is poor attendance.

The LA Attendance Service working jointly with Legal Services may also consider:

- Applying for a parenting order
- Applying for an education supervision order
- School Attendance Order
- Community Order

7. Rewards and Recognition

As part of our commitment to raising attendance levels in our school, we offer a number of different initiatives.

- A trophy and 'Simon', the attendance bear, is awarded to the class each week in Friday's assembly which has the best attendance. The attendance percentage for each class is displayed on a graph in the hall for the children to see.
- Classes are given a letter for every day they have 100% attendance. When they have the 13 letters to spell out 'Star Attenders' that class will have pizza as a treat.
- Classes who have an attendance percentage of 97% or over each week receive an extra play time.
- Termly prizes/treats for 100% attenders.
- Termly certificates for children with 97% or above attendance.