Attendance Policy

Approved by:	LGB	Date: 13th July 2023
Last reviewed on:	7th October 2022	
Next review due by:	1st September 2024	

1. Aims

We are committed to meeting our obligation with regards to school attendance through our whole-school culture and ethos that values good attendance, including:

- Promoting good attendance

- Reducing absence, including persistent and severe absence

- Ensuring every pupil has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled

- Acting early to address patterns of absence

- Building strong relationships with families to ensure pupils have the support in place to attend school We will also promote and support punctuality in attending lessons.

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the working together to improve school attendance from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- Part 6 of The Education Act 1996
- Part 3 of The Education Act 2002
- Part 7 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (and 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016 amendments)
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013
- This policy also refers to the DfE's guidance on the school census, which explains the persistent absence threshold.

3. Roles and responsibilities

The Local Governing Body

- The Local governing body is responsible for:
- Promoting the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos
- Making sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
- Regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data
- Monitoring attendance figures for the whole school
- Making sure staff receive adequate training on attendance
- Holding the Principal to account for the implementation of this policy

School roles	Responsibilities
Principal	- Set challenging targets to exceed national averages for the school overall. Ensure strategy is implemented to make solid progress towards them. - Appoint the SLT Attendance Lead. Provide sufficient time for Attendance Lead to supervise attendance management and to become involved with poor attenders. Also ensure there is sufficient time to analyse data, liaise with teachers and Local Authority officers. Give the Attendance Lead the full responsibility to lead on whole school policy and strategy. - Receive reports on attendance at whole school, year group and class level. Discuss both strengths and weaknesses publicly and give attendance a high status in the school. Talk personally to teachers about their responsibilities regarding attendance. - Take a personal interest in attendance and support intervention with the poorest attenders. - Report statistics to the Governors (LGBs may choose to appoint an attendance governor) and as part of the termly report to governors. Show comparative figures, not isolated statistics. Compare each half-term's figures with those for the previous year at the same time.
School Attendance Lead (SLT)	- Work with the Principal to agree relevant internal attendance targets. Monitor attendance weekly and evaluate progress towards the targets. Identify pupils who are likely to jeopardise the school's performance and plan early intervention to avoid bad habits being established. - Monitor attendance at school, year group and class level. Work in strong collaboration with the Principal to praise strengths and point out weaknesses. - Ensure there is a clear attendance policy, showing who will do what and at what threshold.

	• Keep attendance at the forefront of each member of staff's mind. Ensure all staff know that attendance is their responsibility. • Promote regular attendance, by making use of reward systems, assemblies, parents' evenings, performance reviews, etc. • Involve the governing body. Seek the support of governors in promoting good attendance. • Supervise administrative staff. Ensure registers are checked daily and that the required action at each threshold level is taken at the earliest moment possible. Discourage any sense of collusion with parents who allow absence without good reason. • Feed into revised strategy to address issues with each individual pupil or family.
Class Teacher / Form Tutor	• Do not accept poor attendance. Make 100% attendance the expectation. • Promote regular attendance through rewards and other encouragement. Make it your business and make it clear that poor or erratic attendance is not expected or acceptable. • Ensure that registers are always completed appropriately; never leave blank spaces. • Look carefully at attendance data. Make it your business to spot patterns of absence and overall levels of attendance of individuals. • Make a personal connection with parents of pupils who have regular absence, or patterns of irregular attendance. • Ensure the Principal or Attendance Lead is informed of concerns over attendance. • Following absence, do your best to provide catch-up opportunities so absentees do not fall behind. Where appropriate, ask parents to play a part in reinforcing missed learning.
Attendance Administrator/ Officer	• Follow the school's procedures for first day calling. If no explanation has been received by the time registers close, seek one. • Be prepared to be assertive. Parents must explain absence. Explanations need to be plausible. Avoid any sense of collusion with parents over unnecessary absence. • Do not show sympathy over absence unless you are convinced it is genuine. • Issue attendance letters where required. Make sure they have the effect intended. Do not tolerate a lack of response. Seek advice when you need it. • Hold regular discussions with the Attendance Lead. Ensure the system works. If it does not, come up with suggestions to improve it. • Advise the Attendance Lead of any teacher who fails to maintain the register properly. Registers are legal documents and must be kept carefully and accurately. • Provide data on weekly basis to class teachers and the school's Attendance Lead. • Make sure the Attendance Lead and/or the Principal know about families where bad habits are forming. Make sure action is taken to break bad habits at the earliest opportunity. • Work with the EWO to ensure that letters are sent. • Participate in home visits. • Assist the Attendance Lead and others in collating data for inclusion in reports, attendance returns, etc. • Ensure that details of absences are reflected appropriately through categorisation of absence in the registers. • Pass messages from parents efficiently to the class teacher or other relevant member of staff.

Parents/carers

Parents/carers are expected to:

- Make sure their child attends every day on time
- Call the school to report their child's absence by 9am on the day of the absence and each subsequent day unless it is a notified ongoing illness, and advise when they are expected to return
- Provide the school with MORE THAN ONE emergency contact number for their child
- Ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day

4. Recording attendance

Attendance register

We will keep an attendance register and place all pupils onto this register.

We will take our attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark whether every pupil is:

- Present
- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

Any amendment to the attendance register will include:

- The original entry
- The amended entry
- The reason for the amendment
- The date on which the amendment was made

The name and position of the person who made the amendment

- See appendix 1 for the DfE attendance codes.

We will also record:

- For pupils of compulsory school age, whether the absence is authorised or not
- The nature of the activity if a pupil is attending an approved educational activity
- The nature of circumstances where a pupil is unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances
- We will keep every entry on the attendance register for 3 years
- Pupils must arrive in school by 8.40am, at which time the gates will be closed
- The register will be taken by 8:50am and will close at 9:00am. After 9:00am any pupils who are absent or arrive late will lose their attendance mark for the morning session

4.2 Unplanned absence

The pupil's parent/carer must notify the school of the reason for the absence on the first day of an unplanned absence by 9:00am or as soon as practically possible by ringing the school office and leaving an answerphone message if needed.

We will mark absence due to illness as authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness. If a child becomes a persistent absentee as a result of repeated calls to the school for illness on a daily basis, then the school will mark as unauthorised unless the absence is backed up with a doctor's appointment or evidence from a medical professional of genuine illness preventing attendance at school.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents/carers will be notified of this in advance.

4.3 Planned absence

Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorised as long as the pupil's parent/carer notifies the school in advance of the appointment. Any child attending a medical appointment or any other appointment at another establishment such as a school examination elsewhere is expected to return during the school day where possible.

All medical and dental appointments should be out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

The pupil's parent/carer must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence.

4.4 Lateness and punctuality

A pupil who arrives late, will be marked as late, using the appropriate code.

At Elstow, if attendance drops below 95% we start to track reasons and will send letters to inform parents and carers of the current situation via post.

4.5 Following up unexplained absence

Where any pupil we expect to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will:

- Call the pupil's parent/carer on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason. If the school cannot reach any of the pupil's emergency contacts, the school may ask the Family Support Worker to continue to check

until they receive a reply by phone. The school may send a staff member to the home address to confirm the child is safe and the reason for absence.

- Identify whether the absence is approved or not
- Identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained – this will be no later than 5 working days after the session
- Call the parent/carer on each day that the absence continues without explanation to ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary. If absence continues, the school will consider involving an education welfare officer and conducting a home visit.

Elstow takes absence and child welfare very seriously and will act quickly, using local agencies if there is any suggestion a child is absent, and it is unexplained.

4.6 Reporting to parents/carers

The school will regularly inform parents about their child's attendance and absence levels when attendance falls below 95% due to unauthorised term time holiday, illness or unauthorised absence.

Thresholds	The following are suggested actions the school may take at each threshold:
100%>	Reward regular attendance
<95%	Pupils with attendance at, or below, 95% • For each absence, a designated member of staff makes a telephone call to the family home as early in the day as possible. • Unless a satisfactory explanation has been received, a letter is sent to the parent regarding the absence and asking for an explanation for every session missed. • Ensure appropriate consultation with the School Attendance Officer (AO may be carrying out above checks).
<90%	Pupils deteriorating to 90% Make first day calls as above. • Send a standard letter to parent pointing out the deterioration in attendance levels. • Remind the parent of the school's target levels for attendance and the negative effect of irregular attendance on learning. Require the parent to provide an explanation and comments. • Keep in contact with parents on a weekly basis. Provide encouragement where improvement has been made. • Ensure appropriate consultation with the School Attendance Officer

<85% PA	Pupils deteriorating to 85%
	
	 • Maintain the approaches set out at the previous thresholds. The Attendance Lead should always be involved and should add weight to any interventions already in place.
	 • Ask parents to attend a meeting in school with Attendance Lead, or with a panel of governors, chaired by the Attendance Lead. Use the meeting to investigate why pupil has missed 1.5 sessions per week on average and is well into being a persistent absentee. Discuss
	     o detrimental effect on learning.
	     o Warn of likelihood of referral to the EWO unless improvement is made.
	     o Reach agreements for rapid improvements over the next half term.
	     o Remind the parent that full attendance is the aim and that anything less than 95% will cause concern.
	     o Consider using a parenting contract between school and parent.
	     o Monitor attendance very closely and keep in weekly contact with the parent, either to praise attendance levels or to show ongoing concern.
	 • Referral to the Education Welfare Officer should be considered at this stage depending on confidence.

<80%	Pupils deteriorating to 80% Child Well Being Framework – Complex / High Risk • Send letter. • Refer to Education Welfare Officer (if this has not already taken place) and meet to plan action.

5. Authorised and unauthorised absence

5.1 Approval for term-time absence

Valid reasons for **authorised absence** include:

- Illness and medical/dental appointments (see sections 4.2 and 4.3 for more detail)
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart
- Traveller pupils travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh gypsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) and circus people, bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school, but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision
- Part-time attendance due to SEN needs in agreement with the SEN team at Bedford Borough and the school. It is always the school's position that children in Elstow should transition to attend to full time and have a timetable with this expectation and the dates for full time attendance.

The Principal will only grant a leave of absence to a pupil during term time if they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. A leave of absence is granted at the Principal's discretion, including the length of time the pupil is authorised to be absent for.

We define 'exceptional circumstances' as religious observance, a family wedding or funeral or other unforeseen emergency.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, considering the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request.

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and give the signed form to the school office. The Principal may require evidence to support any request for leave of absence.

5.2 Legal sanctions

The school or local authority can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age.

If issued with a fine, or penalty notice, each parent must pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the local authority.

Penalty notices can be issued by a Principal, local authority officer or the police.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice may consider:

- The number of unauthorised absences occurring within a 12-week rolling academic year
- One-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission
- Where an excluded pupil is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason

If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice.

6. Strategies for promoting attendance

Elstow is proud of its ethos and culture. We promote excellent behaviour, quiet classrooms and enrichment activities including before and after school provision. We share academic certificates in assembly's half termly to celebrate those pupils whose attendance is over 97%. Other ways we encourage attendance are:

- Publishing class attendance in the weekly newsletter
- Over communication with parents/carers regarding the importance of attendance and the schools expectation
- Make phone class home to say 'well done – we have seen an improvement'
- Celebrate classes who have achieved 97% attendance across the week
    - EYFS – Year 3 awarded an attendance bear and a class certificate
    - Year 4 – Year 6 awarded a trophy and a class certificate
- Half termly celebrate individuals who have 97% attendance (e.g., shout out in assembly, awarded a certificate, postcard home)

7. Attendance monitoring

7.1 Monitoring attendance

We will monitor attendance and absence data half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual pupil level to identify whether or not there are particular groups of children whose absences may be a cause for concern.

Pupil-level absence data will be collected each term and published at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics. The school will compare attendance data to the national average and share this with the governing board.

7.2 Reducing persistent and severe absence

Persistent absence is where a pupil misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a pupil misses 50% or more of school. The school will:

- Use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence
- Hold regular meetings with the parents of pupils who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable, or are persistently or severely absent, to discuss attendance and engagement at school
- Provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance

8. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed as guidance from the local authority or DfE is updated, and as a minimum, annually. At every review, the policy will be approved by the full governing board.

9. Links with other policies

This policy links to the following policies:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy
- Behaviour policy

Appendix 1: attendance codes

The following codes are taken from the DfE's guidance on school attendance.

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	Pupil is present at morning registration
\	Present (pm)	Pupil is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	Pupil arrives late before register has closed
B	Off-site educational activity	Pupil is at a supervised off-site educational activity approved by the school
D	Dual registered	Pupil is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
J	Interview	Pupil has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
P	Sporting activity	Pupil is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
V	Educational trip or visit	Pupil is on an educational visit/trip organised, or approved, by the school
W	Work experience	Pupil is on a work experience placement

Code	Definition	Scenario
Authorised absence		
C	Authorised leave of absence	Pupil has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances
E	Excluded	Pupil has been excluded but no alternative provision has been made

H	Authorised holiday	Pupil has been allowed to go on holiday due to exceptional circumstances
I	Illness	School has been notified that a pupil will be absent due to illness
M	Medical/dental appointment	Pupil is at a medical or dental appointment
R	Religious observance	Pupil is taking part in a day of religious observance
S	Study leave	Year 11 pupil is on study leave during their public examinations
T	Gypsy, Roma and traveller absence	Pupil from a traveller community is travelling, as agreed with the school
Unauthorised absence		
G	Unauthorised holiday	Pupil is on a holiday that was not approved by the school
N	Reason not provided	Pupil is absent for an unknown reason (this code should be amended when the reason emerges, or replaced with code O if no reason for absence has been provided after a reasonable amount of time)
O	Unauthorised absence	School is not satisfied with reason for pupil's absence
U	Arrival after registration	Pupil arrived at school after the register closed

Code	Definition	Scenario
X	Not required to be in school	Pupil of non-compulsory school age is not required to attend

Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances	School site is closed, there is disruption to travel as a result of a local/national emergency, or pupil is in custody
Z	Pupil not on admission register	Register set up but pupil has not yet joined the school
#	Planned school closure	Whole or partial school closure due to half term/bank holiday/INSET day