



# Policy No. 9

## Attendance Policy

### AIMS/Intent

- To support parents and families to realise the importance that maximum attendance and punctuality at school is vital for all pupils to achieve their full potential.
- Parents of all new children arriving to the school will be given a copy of the Attendance Policy and will be asked to sign to confirm that they have read it and will support the school in promoting good attendance.
- To reinforce the notion that every child has a right to access the education to which they are entitled and that parents are responsible in law for the regular and punctual attendance of their child.
- To make explicit to all (pupils, parents/carers, teachers) the school's expectations on attendance levels and support strategies to help pupils maximise their attendance.
- To stress the need for home and school to work in partnership to achieve high attendance.

### **Introduction**

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

Elmtree Infant and Nursery School believe 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.

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

Elmtree Infant and Nursery School recognise that attendance and punctuality 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, behaviour and inclusive learning. This policy also takes into account the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010.

## **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 is of Compulsory School Age at the beginning of the term following their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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 2006, require schools to take an attendance register twice a day, once at the start of the morning session and then again during 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.

## **Categorising Absence**

### **Authorised Absence**

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. For example, if a child has been unwell and the parent emails or telephones the school to explain the absence.

Only the school can authorise any absence. Parents do not have this authority. Consequently, not all absences supported by parents will be classified as authorised.

## **Unauthorised Absence**

An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of both the school and a parent.

Therefore, the absence is unauthorised if a child is away from school without good reason, even with the support of a parent. This includes children who arrive after 9:15am, when registers are closed. These absences will affect the child's overall attendance record which is monitored by Bucks County Attendance Team and remains on their school file.

## **Persistent Lateness and Punctuality**

It is the duty of parents/carers to ensure that children attend school regularly and punctually. This encourages habits of good timekeeping and lessens any possible classroom disruption. School starts at 8:55am when the morning register is taken. Children may enter their classrooms from 8:45am when the school doors open. 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 the rest of the day. If a pupil misses this short but vital session, their work for the whole day may be affected. Late arrivals are disruptive to the whole class and often unsettling for the child.

Parents who arrive after school doors are closed must bring their child into school through the main front door via the Office. Parents must give a reason for the lateness, which will be noted in the late record along with the number of minutes late. The child will be marked as 'L' (late) in the register.

If a child arrives at school after 9.15am this will affect their attendance rate percentage, as they were absent at registration. This applies in all cases for being late, including travel delays. Parents must sign their child's name on the electronic screen, giving a valid reason for the lateness. Lateness after 9:15am will be marked as 'U' (unauthorised absence) and will count towards the child's overall attendance record.

Parents of those children who are regularly late arriving to school may be invited to make an appointment with the Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher (HT/DHT) to investigate reasons for lateness and suggest solutions to enable more punctual attendance.

The late record is monitored weekly by the school. In the case of repeated lateness (2 or more times in one week), an email will be sent home to parents notifying them of this advising them on how many occasions their child has been late that week and how many minutes of education they have missed due to this (Appendix 6). The HT or DHT will contact parents by telephone to discuss concerns if parents have received three or more late emails during a half term period (Appendix 6).

## **What happens when a child is absent?**

When a child is absent, the class teacher will record the absence in the register, using the appropriate code. Office staff will check the class registers and begin contacting parents/carers of any child who is absent but whose absence has not been reported by that parent/carer. Calls to parents/carers will be made if no contact has been made by 10:00am.

On the first day of a child's absence, parents are asked to contact the office to give the reason for the absence before 9:15am. This may be done by phone, email, letter or in person. Parents are to contact the School Office every day if their child is absent for more than one day unless a medical note has been received.

If a child has a medical or other necessary appointment, parents should contact the office prior to the day of the absence. If a child is absent due to illness for longer than 3 school days, medical evidence may be requested by the school. Proof of medical appointment may be requested.

If there is any doubt about the whereabouts of a child, the class teacher should take immediate action by notifying the School Office. The office staff will then be in contact as soon as possible with the parent or carer, in order to check on the safety of the child. If no contact is made with the parent/carer and there are concerns about the child's well-being, a home visit may take place or contact made with outside agencies.

Should the pupil have been absent for two continuous weeks 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 Bucks County Attendance Team or Social Care. Should the child be currently involved with Social Care, the child's social worker should be notified immediately.

## **Requests for Exceptional Leave of Absence**

A minority of parents continue to cause disruption to their children's education by withdrawing them from school during term time for the purpose of a family holiday. Many of these parents mistakenly believe that they have a 10-day holiday 'entitlement'.

Children of school age who are registered at a school must, by law, attend that school regularly. Regular attendance is the best way of ensuring that a child makes the most of the educational opportunities which are available to them. Absence during term time, as a result of term time holiday, interrupts continuity of teaching and learning, disrupts the educational progress of individual children and creates disruption in schools. Elmtree Infant and Nursery School therefore strongly discourages holidays being taken in term time and will not authorise term time holiday.

## **Religious Observance**

Elmtree Infant and Nursery 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. This will be marked as R in the register (religious observance).

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

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 other 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 a 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 then the expectation is that their child will attend full-time. Elmtree Infant and Nursery 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 Elmtree Infant and Nursery 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. Elmtree Infant and Nursery School can operate effectively as the child's base school only if we are engaged in on-going dialogue with Traveller families. This means that parents must advise of their forthcoming travelling patterns before they happen and inform the school regarding proposed return dates. Elmtree Infant and Nursery 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's Traveller Education Service or the child is undertaking computer-based distance learning that is time evidenced. Where Traveller children are registered pupils at a school and are known to be present either at a 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.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Elmtree Infant and Nursery School believe that improved school attendance and punctuality can only be achieved if it is viewed as a shared responsibility of the school staff, governors, parents, pupils and the wider school community.

HT/DHT will:

- Offer a clear vision for attendance and punctuality underpinned by high expectations and core values.
- Ensure staff, pupils and families understand that absence from school is a potential safeguarding risk.
- Expect good attendance and punctuality from all school staff, pupils and families.
- Convey clear messages about how absence affects attainment, wellbeing and wider outcomes.
- Promote attendance practice as part of staff induction.
- Contact parents and carers regarding absence and punctuality.
- Identify barriers and reasons for absence.
- Provide all class teachers with attendance data for the previous half term for each pupil within their class.
- Empower staff to take responsibility for attendance and punctuality.
- Implement systems to report, record and monitor the attendance and punctuality of all pupils, including those who are educated off-site.
- Analyse attendance and punctuality data to identify causes and patterns of absence.
- Work with other agencies to improve attendance and punctuality and support pupils and their families.
- Document interventions used to a standard required by the Local Authority should legal proceedings be instigated.
- Comply with the Registration Regulations, England, 2006 and other attendance related legislation.
- Contribute to the evaluation of school strategies and interventions.

All staff will:

- Make sure there is a welcoming and positive culture across the school.
- Model respectful relationships and appropriate communication.
- Treat pupils and families with dignity, build relationships rooted in mutual

respect and observe proper boundaries.

- Take into consideration the vulnerability of some pupils and the ways in which this may contribute to absence.
- Communicate effectively with families regarding pupils' attendance, punctuality and wellbeing.
- Actively promote the importance and value of good attendance and punctuality to pupils and their parents.
- Form positive relationships with pupils and parents.
- Communicate openly and honestly about expectations of school life and performance.
- Contribute to a whole school approach which reinforces good school attendance and punctuality; with good teaching and learning experiences that encourage all pupils to attend and to achieve.
- Promote and apply rewards and sanctions consistently.

The school requests that Parents will:

- Treat all staff with respect.
- Actively support the work of 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 school and home.
- Call on staff for help when they need it.
- Communicate as early as possible circumstances which may affect absence and punctuality or require support.
- Talk to their child about school and what goes on there.
- Take a positive interest in their child's work and educational progress.
- Instill the value of education and regular school attendance and punctuality within the home environment.
- Encourage their child to look to the future and have high aspirations.
- Contact the school if their child is absent to let them know the reason why and the expected date of return. Communication may be via telephone, e-mail or a note.
- Avoid unnecessary absences by making appointments for the doctors, dentists etc. outside of school hours.
- Encourage routine at home, for example, bedtimes, homework, preparing school bag and uniform the evening before.
- Only keep their child at home if they are unwell
- Avoid taking their child on holiday during term-time.

## Using Attendance Data

- All pupils' attendance will be monitored and analysed regularly through register inspections, code analysis, cohort and group monitoring, punctuality and benchmarking.
- Emerging patterns and trends will inform whole school strategies to improve attendance and attainment.
- Barriers to attendance and punctuality will be identified.
- Action plans to support families will be created
- Intervention impact will be monitored and adjusted as necessary.
- The Bucks County Attendance Team and other agencies will be informed if a pupil's attendance does not improve and will progress to step 4 of the Elmtree Step System. All information shared will be done so in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.
- Data will be shared with the Governing Body in an anonymised format.

## Deletions from the Register

In accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, pupils will be deleted from the register only when one of the following circumstances applies:

- The school is replaced by another school on a School Attendance Order
- The School Attendance Order is revoked by the Local Authority
- The pupil has ceased to be of compulsory school age
- Permanent exclusion has occurred, and procedures have been completed
- Death of a pupil
- Transfer between schools
- When a parent informs the school in writing that the pupil is to be withdrawn to be educated outside the school system
- Failure to return from an extended holiday after both the school and the local authority have tried to locate the pupil
- A medical condition prevents their attendance and return to the school before ending compulsory school-age
- 20 days' continuous unauthorised absence have elapsed and both the Local Authority and school have tried to locate the pupil
- A pupil has left the school, but it is not known where he/she has gone after both the school and the Local Authority have tried to locate the pupil

Elmtree Infant and Nursery School will follow Buckinghamshire County Council's Children Missing in Education Protocol when a pupil's whereabouts is unknown.

## Promoting Good Attendance

Pupils will be encouraged to attend school regularly and school staff will support pupils to understand the importance of being in school. Attendance percentages for each class are reported in the newsletter every half term.

## **Repeated Unauthorised Absences**

### The Elmtree Step

This Elmtree Step System will enable Elmtree Infant and Nursery School to continuously and consistently monitor and address issues pertaining to poor school attendance and punctuality. The system offers the school the opportunity to target non-attendance methodically and progressively up to and including the point at which a request for a penalty notice may be necessary. The system is based on a four-step process which we can follow when there are concerns about any emerging patterns of absenteeism.

It is intended to apply to any absence which is unauthorised, but with some modification it might, in certain circumstances, be used to target patterns of absence which are beginning to cause concern.

#### **Key Features and Potential Benefits:**

- Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher can focus on the attendance of all pupils at least half termly.
- Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher can quickly and easily identify those pupils whose attendance is becoming a cause of concern.
- In most cases Step 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 request a Penalty notice or involve Education Welfare Service.
- As the Education Welfare Service 'School Attendance' leaflet is given to parents/carers during the formal Parent Contract Meeting, parents are made aware of the existence and role of the Bucks County Attendance Team prior to any subsequent involvement should this prove necessary.
- The school can readily identify emerging attendance and punctuality problems and therefore target support accordingly.
- The school builds up a consistent record of their own attendance and punctuality interventions and is able to ensure that when they do need to involve the Bucks County attendance Team, they do this only when their own efforts have proved unsuccessful.

#### **How the System Works:**

- The school produces a record of attendance twice per half term for all pupils whose attendance has fallen below 96%.
- These pupils are discussed at attendance review meetings, looking for emerging trends and patterns. Families are targeted by the Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher for additional support.

### **Step 1 - Letter 1 (Appendix 1)**

- For those pupils who have been identified for the first time with attendance falling below 96%, a copy of Letter 1 (Appendix 1) is sent to the parents/carers.
- Should the pupil's attendance improve, but the improvement fails to be sustained, a further copy of Letter 1 may be sent at a later date.

### **Step 2 – Telephone Call to Parents/Carers (notes recorded on Appendix 2)**

- If attendance does not improve, parents/carers will be contacted by phone to advise them of this. They will be reminded about the importance of regular school attendance and any immediate issues will be discussed.
- The Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher will discuss barriers to the pupils' regular school attendance or punctuality and identify any possible solutions.
- A target of 96% attendance over a specified monitoring period will be set and medical evidence will be required for any further absences to be recorded using the 'I' code. (Illness)
- This call will be documented, and parents will receive an email documenting what interventions have been agreed, the 96% attendance target and the monitoring period. Parents/carers will be informed that a penalty notice could be issued if targets are not met.

### **Step 3 – Letter 2 (Appendix 3) Requesting Formal Parent Contract Meeting (notes from meeting recorded on Appendix 4)**

- Following the sending of Letter 1 and the telephone call, should the pupil's attendance fail to improve within an eight week period, or should it fall to a lower level, parents/carers will be sent Letter 2 (Appendix 3). They will be invited to attend a Formal Parent Contract Meeting with the Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher to discuss issues that may be affecting the pupil's attendance and identify how the school can help address this. This meeting will be formally documented (Appendix 4) and parents/carers will be reminded that it is their "legal responsibility, as stated under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, to ensure that their child attends the school at which he/she is registered, regularly and punctually." During the meeting, a minimum attendance target of 96% over an eight-week monitoring period will be set. The Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher will sign this formal agreement and all parents/carers present at the meeting will be asked to sign that they understand and agree to this.
- Parents/carers will be requested to contact the school within seven days receipt of the Letter 2 to arrange a date to attend a formal Parent Contract Meeting with the Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher.

## **Step 4 – Request for Second Parent Contract Meeting or Penalty Notice**

- Following the formal Parent Contract meeting, should the pupil's attendance fail to improve within the agreed 8 week monitoring period, or should it fall to a lower level and no satisfactory explanation for the absences has been provided, then the school may request:
- A further Parent Contract Meeting to discuss extending the monitoring period
- A penalty notice for non-attendance form may be completed and sent to the county's Legal Panel for discussion.
- The Education Welfare Officer will be informed and may write to parents/carers requesting their attendance at a Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) meeting.

## **Legal Sanctions**

Where intervention fails to bring about an improvement in attendance, Elmtree Infant and Nursery School will notify the Bucks County Attendance Team of the irregular attendance.

The Bucks 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 also 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.