



NE/XT: Cluster Attendance Policy January 2014



Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Primary is part of the NE/XT family of schools who have a collective agreement on their approach to attendance, based on local authority guidance.

Refer to: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/attendance> and in particular the following two Department of Education documents:

- Parental responsibility measures for school attendance and behaviour: statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, local authorities and the police, November 2013
(mainly regarding parents' responsibility)
- School attendance: departmental advice for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities, November 2013
(mainly regarding schools' responsibility)

Aims, principles and expectations

The main aims of this policy are to:

- sustain awareness of the importance of good attendance and punctuality
- sustain good / outstanding levels of attendance in school amongst pupils

Excellent attendance is fundamental to ensuring that children and young people reach their full potential and have the best life chances and opportunities in their future lives. It is the responsibility of Leeds City Council, all schools, parents / carers and pupils to work in partnership to ensure that all our children and young people receive an appropriate education suitable to their needs.

We expect:

- children on roll to attend every day, when the school is open, as long as they are fit and healthy to do so
- parents / carers and pupils to work in partnership with us to ensure that all our children receive an appropriate education suitable to their needs

Attendance / absence is presented as a percentage figure, but it's helpful to equate this to number of days off:

98% = fewer than four days absent in a school year
95% = fewer than ten days absent in one school year
90% = 4 weeks absent in one school year (equates to a ½ day each week)
85% = 5.5 weeks absent in one school year (approaching a whole half-term in the school year)
80% = 7.5 weeks absent in one school year (equates to one day each week or a whole half-term)

Over five years, children with an average attendance of 85-90% will have missed half a school year of education while children with an average attendance of 80% will have missed the equivalent of a whole school year.

Definitions

Attendance is defined as the participation in a programme of educational activities arranged by the school, which might include an off-site provision. A child's attendance record will follow them throughout their statutory education.

Authorised absence may be given for:

- genuine illness
- medical appointment (routine dental appointments should be arranged out of school time)
- religious observance (only up to two days per academic year)
- approved leave where there are exceptional circumstances, as agreed by the Headteacher

Unauthorised absence will be recorded for:

- absence in term time where permission has not been given by the school in accordance with the NE/XT Attendance Policy; this states that parents / carers do not have the right to take their child out of school during term time (see examples below for guidance)
- truancy, defined as unauthorised absence from school for any period as a result of premeditated or spontaneous action on the part of the pupil, parent / carer or both
- Arrival after the registers have closed ie 30 minutes after close of registers

- **Unexplained absence.** Any child whose absence is on-going and remains unexplained or unauthorised for an extended period will, after four weeks, will be removed from the registers and reported as a child missing in education.

Exceptional circumstances

Parents do not have the right to remove their children from school during term time. The recent changes to pupil registration regulations have removed the discretionary ten day period for headteachers to authorise a holiday in term time. They also state that **any** requests for leave during term-time can only be authorised in **exceptional circumstances**. Schools will consider each request individually taking into account the circumstances, such as: the nature of the event for which leave is sought; the frequency of the request; whether the parent gave advance notice; and the pupil's attainment, attendance and ability to catch up on missed schooling. In addition, the legislation is clear that requests for leave must be made to the school in advance of the leave being taken. It is also at the headteacher's discretion as to how long to authorise, if they decide to do so.

Absence in term time will only be considered if parents / carers make a request to the school on the appropriate application form giving exceptional reasons why the application for absence has been requested and providing information to support their application. The Headteacher will decide whether or not the absence will be authorised and will inform parents in writing.

Leeds City Council have provided schools with detailed guidance about what may be considered exceptional. Categories of absence that will **never** be considered exceptional are:

- Availability of cheaper holidays
- Birthdays
- Trips to see sporting or musical events
- Day trip, shopping or visit to hairdresser
- Over-sleeping
- Family celebration / taking a long weekend
- Taking the rest of the day off before or after a medical appointment

Absence due to illness

If a school has concerns about the level of illness a child has, and it appears that an excessive amount of time has been taken, medical evidence will be required to support the time taken.

In some circumstances the school may suggest that a child be referred to the School Health Team which works with parents / carers, teaching staff and other agencies, to provide confidential health advice to children and young people throughout their school life. If a parent does not take up the offer of a referral to the School Health Team and attendance continues to be of concern this will lead to the school recording future absences as unauthorised unless there is medical evidence provided by parents / carers.

Concerns regarding attendance

The NE/XT Family of Schools have a proactive approach to attendance and, as such, have in place a range of strategies to ensure good attendance day-to-day which includes 'first day calls'. This process ensures that, when a child does not arrive at school, and there has been no explanation, the school will contact the family in the early part of the morning. If the absence is expected to be longer than two days, then the school will expect the family to keep in touch with them and let them know of the likely date of return as soon as possible.

If attendance causes concern the school may take the following steps:

Below 96%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family will be made aware by letter of the situation and informed that attendance will be monitored over the next half term • If there is further absence and attendance falls further, at the start of the next half term, a second letter will be sent to parents/carers inviting them to speak to the class teacher. • Appropriate support will be offered.
Below 90%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents / carers will be invited to a meeting with the class teacher to discuss plans for improvement. Appropriate support will be put in place. • If no improvement in attendance is made within the following half term, there will be a formal meeting arranged with the Attendance Officer so that they are fully informed and warned about possible penalties relating to poor attendance and a formal action plan may be put in place. • If improvement in attendance is not sustained the case may be referred to the Local Authority.
Below 85%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A parenting contract will be discussed with the Attendance Officer • Penalty Warning Letter / Notice will be sent as appropriate

Ultimately parents / carers will be held to account for failing to ensure that their children attend school regularly. Targeted Services carry out this statutory function on behalf of the local authority in order to uphold the right of children and young people to access their education. Where necessary, statutory action can and will be taken, which may take the form of a penalty notice fine, prosecution of parents in the Magistrate's Court resulting in a fine, or a statutory order. In the case of an aggravated offence ie repeat offenders, a parent / carer can face a fine, imprisonment or community punishment.

Penalty notices

Where parents / carers take their child out of school for a holiday in term time ie for ten or more unauthorised absences (five days), the school will refer to the Local Authority and a £60 Penalty Notice will be sent to parents / carers immediately. This fine is payable per child, per parent / carer eg two parents and two children will equate to a £240 fine.

If a pupil has ten or more unauthorised sessions (one session = one half day) in a school term or in any 12 school week period, the school will refer to the Local Authority. In all schools, there may be a number of pupils who have ten unauthorised absences or more. In such cases the Local Authority with the school identifies these pupils. They will then send a letter to the parents / carers informing them that their child's attendance is to be monitored over the next four weeks and any further unauthorised absences will lead to the parents / carers being invited to an attendance meeting. At this stage the parents / carers are issued with a Penalty Warning letter. Should their child have any unauthorised absences during the following four school weeks, a £60 Penalty Notice may be issued to parents / carers.

Monitoring

The NE/XT Cluster of Schools aim to be consistent in their approach to leave of absence. Headteachers will refer to detailed guidance from Leeds City Council on this issue and individual cases. Headteachers will moderate their decisions within the cluster to ensure that there is a fair and equitable approach. Parents should also expect that, where siblings are known to attend another school, schools will communicate about requests in respect of all the children in the family.