



Attendance and Punctuality Policy

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Rationale

Wirksworth Federation of Infant Schools is committed to helping children make the best possible progress with their education. To do this, they need to attend school regularly and punctually. It is a parents' legal responsibility to ensure that this happens.

It is recognised that for illness or other exceptional reasons, children may occasionally have to be absent from school, but it needs to be made clear that in the interests of their education, they should only be kept off school if it is essential.

We believe that the most important factor in promoting good attendance and punctuality is development of positive attitudes towards school. To this end, we strive to make our school a happy and rewarding experience for all children.

Definitions

Authorised Absence

- An absence is classified as authorised when a child is away from school for a legitimate reason and the school has received notification from a parent or guardian.
- Only the school can make an absence authorised. Parents, carers or guardians do not have this authority. Consequently, not all absences supported by parents, carers or guardians will be classified as authorised.
- An authorised absence could be one of the following:
 1. Genuine sickness
 2. "Unavoidable causes" such as severe weather conditions which make travel impossible, major domestic upset, fire, sudden death of a relative etc.
 3. Advance permission may be given by the headteacher for events such as hospital visits, funeral of close relatives etc.

Unauthorised absence

An absence is classed as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of the Headteacher. Unauthorised absences are those which could:

- Jeopardise a child's educational welfare.
- Could be done outside school hours. This would include non-essential events such as shopping, having a hair cut and any non-urgent medical

appointments such as eye-checks or dental check-ups that could be made out of school hours.

Punctuality

- All children should be in school and ready for registration by 9.00am each day. Children may enter school from 8.40am.
- Class teachers take the register at 9.05am. Children arriving after this time, but before 9.30am will be marked as "L", indicating a late in the register.
- Any child arriving in school after 9.30am will be marked as "U", indicating that they have arrived after the register has closed.
- If a child arrives late on a regular basis, parents/carers will be spoken to by the class teacher and a record of this will be kept on file.

If a child is absent

- Parents/carers are expected to email or telephone school by 9.30am on the morning of the first day of absence, and then again on the 3rd day of absence if appropriate. They should state a reason.
- If by 9.30am no message has been received regarding the reason for the absence the school office will endeavour to contact the parent/carer.
- If there is any doubt about the whereabouts of a child, the class teacher should take immediate action by notifying the school office. The school office in liaison with the SENCO will then make attempts to be in contact straight away with the parent/carer and, where relevant the Multi-Agency Team (MAT) to check on the safety of the child.

Leave of absence

The DFE made amendments to the Education (Pupil Registration England) Regulations 2006 on 1st September 2013 stating that headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time, including holidays, unless there are exceptional circumstances. These regulations also state that holidays cannot be authorised retrospectively.

- Advanced permission is required for any leave of absence, and a special form needs to be filled out beforehand. A copy of this form, and how to use it, is available from the school office and our website. We recommend speaking to the school office or head teacher for advice prior to completing the form.
- Any requests for leave of absence will be taken on its own merits and based on the information provided by the parent/carer.
- An absence will not be authorised purely on the basis of a child's high level of attendance.

- A leave of absence that has not been agreed will be recorded as unauthorised and you will be notified of this decision by letter. Should you still decide to take your child out of school you may be issued with a Penalty Notice from the Local Authority. If unpaid this could lead to prosecution under section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996.
- All requests for exceptional leave of absence should be received by the school office at least 10 working days before the date the leave is due to start. Requests received less than 10 days before the start date will be automatically recorded as unauthorised and may result in a penalty notice being issued.
- If it is not possible to give a minimum of 10 days notice due to emergency circumstances then a meeting should be arranged directly with the Headteacher or, in their absence, a member of senior staff who will discuss the emergency request for leave with you.

Exceptional circumstances

Headteachers within our school cluster met to agree a common definition of 'exceptional circumstances' to ensure consistency across the schools in our area. Two tests were agreed which are applied to every application for leave of absence, these are:

- Could the leave reasonably be taken at another time?
- Will the leave unduly affect the child's education and progress?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then the application will be refused. Should a parent/carer decide to take their child out of school when leave has been refused, then the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and this may be picked up by the Education Welfare Service. A leave of absence that has not been agreed will be recorded as unauthorised. Should you still decide to take your child out of school you may be issued with a Penalty Notice. If unpaid, this could lead to prosecution under section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996.

Should your child have siblings at another school within the area then your application will be discussed with that other school in order to agree a decision.

Guiding principles

Term times are for education. This is the priority. Children and families have 175 days off school to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. Headteachers will rightly prioritise attendance. The default school

policy is that absences will not be granted during term-time and will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.

The decision to authorise a child's absence is wholly at the Headteacher's discretion based on their assessment and merits of each request.

- If an event can be reasonably scheduled outside of term time then it would not be normal to authorise for such an event - holidays are therefore not considered 'exceptional circumstances'.
- Absences to visit seriously-ill relatives or for a bereavement of a close family member are usually considered to amount to 'exceptional circumstances', but for the funeral service only, not for extended leave. If distance warrants travelling time, one day either side of the funeral can be authorised.
- Absences for a family wedding for close family members are usually considered to amount to 'exceptional circumstances'. If distance warrants travelling time, one day either side of the wedding can be authorised. If the absence incorporates a family holiday the remaining days will not be authorised.
- Applications for exceptional leave citing that a partner/parent is unable to take time off work in school holidays must be accompanied by an official letter from their employer.
- Applications for exceptional leave for 'special birthdays' will not be authorised.
- Absences for important religious observances are often taken into account when requests for exceptional leave are made but only for the ceremony (this may include travelling time). This is intended for one-off situations rather than regular or recurring events.
- The Federation has a duty to make reasonable adjustments for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) when requests for exceptional leave are made.
- The Federation will take into account when considering requests for exceptional leave the needs of the families of service personnel if they are returning from long operational tours that prevent contact during scheduled school holiday time
- The Federation will take into account requests for exceptional leave if families need time together to recover from a trauma or crisis.

Absence monitoring and reporting to parents

The Federation uses a 'traffic light' system to track children's attendance. Attendance is monitored half termly but reported to parents/carers termly.

- **GREEN** attendance above 96.5%
- **AMBER** attendance between 90% and 96.5%
- **RED** attendance below 90%

The process below is used to notify parents/carers of their child's attendance.

- At the end of each term the senior leaders will review and analyse attendance data for individual children.
- Children with attendance of 96.5% will receive an "Amazing Attender" Certificate.
- If deemed necessary, and where there have been no extenuating circumstances, parents/carers of persistent absentees (ie those with attendance below 90%) will be informed of their child's low level of attendance. They may be asked to attend a meeting with the safeguarding lead and/or Headteacher, discuss the importance of regular attendance and how school and parent/carers can work together to improve their child's attendance.
- Where no significant improvement in attendance is seen over two terms, it may be necessary to involve external agencies.

Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed in accordance with the Federation's monitoring and review cycle. The Governing Body may, however, review the policy earlier than this in response to new regulations or if they receive recommendations on how the policy might be improved.